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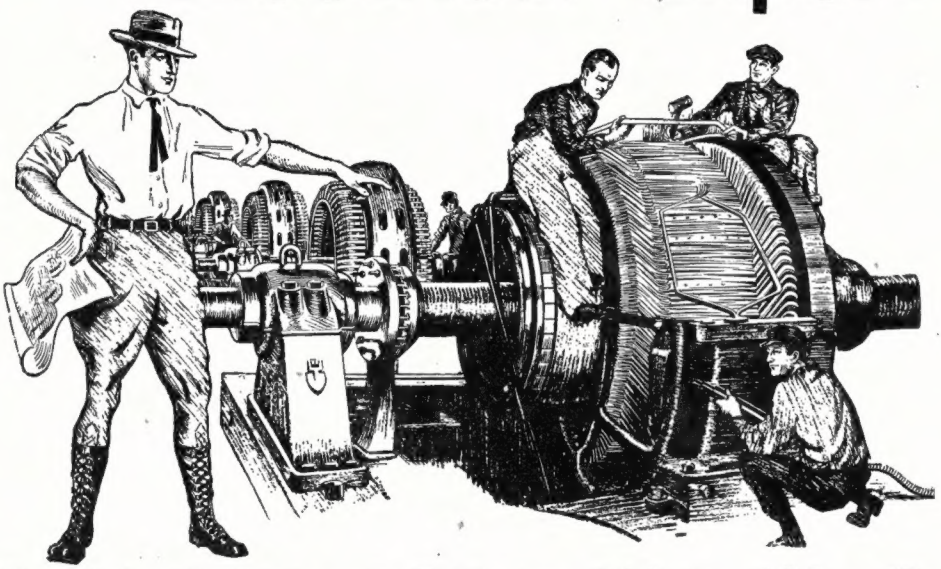

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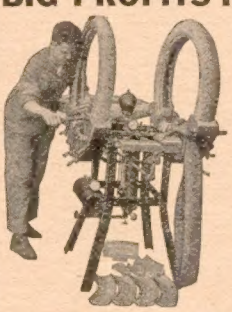

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VOL. XXVIII. NO III

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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POLICEMEN beat on the door in the middle of the night, and in the darkness and fog *Don Everhard* begins one of the most exciting battles of his career. "BLUFFED," a complete novel by Gordon Young in the next issue.

OF A man who wakes to find he has three identities, wealth and unknown enemies. "OTHER MEN'S SHOES," a novelette by H. Bedford-Jones and W. C. Robertson, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure

February 3
1921
Vol. XXVIII
No. 3

The Road to El Dorado

A Complete Novel

by HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Red Belts," "Kings of the Missouri," etc.

CHAPTER I

AT BENT'S OLD FORT

FOR half a century traders had risked the dangers of the Arkansas River road for the sake of Santa Fé profits, while free trappers had penetrated to the headwaters of the Arkansas to barter for Indian robes. During a great portion of this period the American Fur Company and its various rivals had exploited the upper Platte and Missouri for furs.

But neither trader nor trapper caused much apprehension to the mountain and plains Indians. The former kept to the trail, eager to make Taos and Santa Fé and bring their profits home; the latter were one with the red man in desiring to conserve the wild life, and therefore had no sympathy for home-seekers. Thus it had been for years; white men came and went, seeking Mexican silver and mountain beaver.

Then white women and children appeared on the plains; and word sped from the Blackfeet and Assiniboins in the north to the Lipan Apaches on the Rio Grande that the white race was deserting its lodges under the rising sun. The traders and trapper foresaw that the women and children meant a mighty migration.

Until the '45 migration these venturesome settlers usually moved in one compact party, their wagons and stock giving the aspect of a mighty host. As the pioneers developed confidence they dared to travel in units of from fifty to a hundred and fifty wagons each. The grass was "fed down" along the Oregon Trail, and the groves of timber marking the waterways began to show shrinkage.

No wonder the astounded red man believed that the East was emptied of its people; nor is it surprizing that he should dream of crossing the Mississippi and taking over the abandoned lodges and fields. It

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was the first great movement of whites across the plains when women and children were taken along. The more astute of the red race were quick to reason that these newcomers were planning to make a long visit. And as the grass and fuel was levied upon along the trails so was game killed, often wastefully, or frightened away by the white hordes.

Scarcely had the significance of this invasion percolated from Milk River to the Rio when another exodus was under way. The Mormon hegira commenced in 1846 with fifteen thousand, of both sexes and all ages, striking blindly into the West. When they abandoned Nauvoo, their last settlement east of the Mississippi, they left behind them a town larger than Chicago and easily the most important center in Illinois. At Grand Island on the Platte they knowingly turned aside from the Oregon Trail and without knowing whither they were going blazed the Mormon path to Great Salt Lake.

This movement was consummated inside of three years; and because of the immigrants' hostility to the "Gentiles" their intercourse with the Indians was more friendly than that of other settlers. Yet their coming was another white wedge into the heart of the red country.

Now the Indians were alive to their danger. The buffalo, once free to range from the Rocky Mountains to the Alleghanies, were being cooped up on the plains. The ancient paths made by the shaggy creatures as they fed from stream to stream still ran north and south, but the farthermost eastern trails, where Kansas and Nebraska homesteads encroached upon the prairies, were closed trails now. One did not need to be a medicine man to foresee the buffalo's doom.

The Indians were more keenly alive to the portent of the westward travel than were many white men back in the East. The movement to Oregon was openly ridiculed by many who could not read the truth. The senator from South Carolina scoffed at the suggestion of a State ever being carved from the Oregon country, a land so remote as to require a year of travel for one to make Washington and return home.

Until the treaty with England in 1846 finally decided the future of Oregon the English publicists declared it would be impossible to settle the virgin country by overland travel. It was not until Dr. and Mrs. Whitman and a dozen other men and women were massacred by the natives in November, 1847, that the East woke up to the necessity of giving a territorial form of government to Oregon.

The aboriginal proprietors of the trans-Mississippi country were not yet done with the white race, however. In 1848 marvelous tales of gold swept through the East, stimulating the imagination from the tip of Maine to the toe of Florida.

In the following year began the tremendous rush for the gold-fields, the third distinct movement across the Indian country inside of a decade. Along the Arkansas and its tributaries cottonwood growths melted away. The white race had spawned again. Hundreds of thousands were to cross the plains within twenty years from the day the first piece of gold was picked up at Sutter's Fort.

The red man's old life was closing. Years of fighting would pass and many lives must end in agony, but the last chapter was plotted out when the three movements were begun; homes in Oregon, homes and isolation in the valley of Great Salt Lake, and marvelous wealth in the valley of the Sacramento.

If there was any lingering hope in the heart of the Indian that the force of the white tide had spent itself, that now surely the East was drained of whiteskins, that illusion was to be dispelled once gold was discovered in Colorado in 1858. This latest lure was to bring tens of thousands up the Arkansas, the Republican and the Platte, all bound for Pike's Peak and other localities.

And this time there would be no choice of routes for the gold-hunters, no deflecting of thousands around the Cape and across the Isthmus. The way to the new El Dorado was across the hunting-grounds of the Indians. The various streams flowing from the mountains to the Missouri and Mississippi were to be the scenes of so many wild stampedes to make Pike's Peak, "or bust."

With the exception of the Kiowas the central plains tribes were strongly inclined to peace until the Colorado discoveries set in motion far-reaching effects. The old fears must again torment the red men. They had learned that the finding of gold in their country was as deadly to them as

a pestilence. Now the white would come again, afoot and horseback, with pack-animals and wagon-trains.

IN THE late Summer of 1858, while the great news was spreading to the Missouri, the Mississippi and the silver country of Nevada, there rode down the Arkansas road from Pueblo a man who typed mountain man and plains man, for he was both. He gravely claimed he always had been called California Joe, and it is doubtful if any one knew his true name. He was a trapper of the old days, who like his brother mountain men never thought to look for gold except as it grew on a beaver's back. It is a phenomenon of the fur trade that all the wanderings of the hired and free trapper should produce so little data concerning the yellow metal.

California Joe was taking life leisurely in the Wet Mountains Valley when a man from the north brought word of the discovery. Joe was on his way to keep an appointment made months before when the news overtook him.

The possibilities of making a rich strike tempted him not at all. He was disinterested except as he regretted any agency which would flood the country with greenhorns, interfere with hunting and demoralize the Indians. He had discounted the much talked-over transcontinental railroad line, believing that sectional jealousies would block the project indefinitely. But one couldn't ignore new gold-fields. North and South might wrangle over a railroad, with neither obtaining it, but gold was a magnet that drew deadly enemies together as well as brothers.

He was sorry any gold had been found. By the time he reached Timpas Creek he was deciding it would be necessary for him to recast all his plans for the Winter.

Lazily lowering his six feet and three inches of bone and muscle from the saddle, he prepared to make camp. A piece of elk-meat tied to the saddle, some coffee and a tin pan were all he needed once he lighted a fire.

He was hungry, or he would not have halted to camp while the sun was several hours high. And yet he took time to stare at the Spanish Peaks in the southwest and regret that his errand down the trail was not finished and he free to leave the country before the wild men came. Flight was impossible, of course, so long as Tom Reason, his partner, was somewhere on the road to meet him.

After scrutinizing the broken country ahead he collected dry sage-brush and stunted cottonwood and made his fire and set the meat to roasting before it while he procured water from the creek and boiled the coffee. He smoked while waiting for the meat to cook, ate hurriedly, and smoked again.

Finishing his pipe, he rose and once more studied the eastern sky-line. What he saw caused him to kick the fire to pieces and to inform his horse:

"Injun smoke, or we'll never see buf'ler grass again! Small camp. No signalin' 'bout it."

To the ordinary vision there was no trace of smoke, yet he had detected it, and he knew that by this time sharp eyes had discovered the blue wisp sent up by his own fire. He had three courses:

To advance boldly and claim the hospitality of the Indians; remain until the Indians came to him, thus waiving his claim to their hospitality; or retreat to the mountains. He was on his way to meet his friend, so flight was out of the question. He tugged thoughtfully at his brown beard and mused aloud:

"Tommy oughter be atween here and Bent's new tradin'-post—if he ain't been rubbed out. If them Injuns is ugly they'll be ugly to him, an' th' cuss will wade right into 'em jest to keep his word with me.

"Hope they ain't Kiowas. But if they be, Tom'll blow in on 'em jest th' same.

"Ol' hoss, reckon we've got to drop in for tea with them reds, no matter what their breed may be. Even if they're Kiowas they'll go slow 'bout wipin' out a man who comes of his own will into their camp. That is, 'less they've got word that all th' white folks atween th' Missoury an' Bosting is 'bout to make 'em a visit an' fetch along their knittin'.

"If I can git into their camp alive I don't 'low they'll drag my head. Never find out by stickin' here."

Securing his horse, he resumed his journey, skirting the base of the low hills or riding over those that crowded close to the river. Perhaps no plains or mountain man was more of an enigma to his acquaintances than was California Joe. In a land and time when few inquiries were made as to

one's antecedents there were yet as a rule some scraps of gossip which revealed something of the wanderer's past.

Not so in California Joe's case. There was no penetrating his *nom de prairie*. He remained a mystery.

He knew the country intimately from the Pacific to the Missouri. Possibly he was not surpassed as an all-round shot. He was deeply versed in knowledge of the red man and had encountered many tribes.

From the name he wore it was obvious he was partial to California and had lived there for some time. Yet any other place-name would have fitted him as well; for he was thoroughly at home in the Oregon country, at the Three Forks of the Missouri or in the Taos Valley.

One quality made him a prime favorite of all—his unfailing good-nature, which was based on a keen sense of humor. He loved to tell innumerable yarns, and he was as loquacious as Tom Reason was taciturn.

The law of contrarieties attracted and held the two men together. They had traveled widely together. Sometimes they separated, with Joe lavishing advice on his silent friend, the latter saying farewell in a curt nod.

They met by agreement in unfrequented places, and often with a bewildering lack of definiteness as to locality. It was told of Joe that once he requested Reason to meet him in the Sierra Nevada Mountains at the end of six months, this trysting-place including the larger portion of California.

Their reunions were celebrated by Joe's garrulous accounts of some new valley or mountain pass. Sometimes Reason would take the wind from his sails by informing him—

"There a year ago."

Reason's discoveries were ascertained by Joe only by long and exhaustive cross-examinations, a process of elimination which was based on queries that could be answered by a nod or shake of the head. Now Joe was ready to risk his life simply because six months back Reason had "'lowed he'd be along that way 'bout th' end of Summer." Which had been a tremendously long speech for Reason to make and the strongest evidence of his desire to have his old friend meet him.

"Sawed-off little cuss would be homesick as a buf'ler calf left on a Bosting farm if I didn't show up," chuckled the trapper.

He was hoping the camp ahead was that of Comanche, Cheyenne, or Arapaho—of any tribe except the Kiowa. But if it must be the last he ardently hoped the big chief Dohasan was not present. Once he left Dohasan's village on the Canadian in a great hurry, and the chief had vowed to make a feast of his ears to the tribal medicine before killing him in the Kiowa way.

AS THE trapper passed over the hills and secured a wider view of the surrounding country and observed the poor grass he was surprized that the Indians should make a camp in that neighborhood. He covered several miles without sighting the camp, and he was wondering if he had been mistaken when he rounded a small sand-hill, anchored by scanty vegetation, and came upon a Mexican.

"Meester Joe! Señor Joe!" called out the Mexican.

"Hold up yer head so's I can see under that derned hat. Black Garcia!" cried Joe. "How's trade?"

"Bad," was the sullen reply. "No good. Everything upside down."

"I seen a smoke an' am huntin' for it."

"My smoke, *señor*—Meester Joe."

"Good! But what ye doin' out here alone? Where's yer outfit?"

"Lost a pony. Goods back in small village—five miles."

"What Injuns?"

"Kiowa."

"Bully!" exclaimed Joe. "Hope Dohasan is there."

Garcia eyed him sardonically and regretted:

"Too bad. Up north after buffalo. On Smoky Hill, or Republican."

"Who's head Injun while he's away?"

"Setangya." "Call him Satank, or Sittin' B'ar when ye talk English."

This famous chief and medicine man was well known to the trapper. He was leader of the Kaitsenko, the highest division of the Kiowa Dog Soldier society. It was his privilege and duty to carry the sacred medicine arrow when going into battle. California Joe had as little desire to meet him as he had to meet Dohasan.

The Mexican misconstrued his silence, and advised:

"Ride like ——! Setangya has one gringo he's keeping as medicine. He has no tent for more."

"A white man? Who is he?" excitedly demanded the trapper.

The Mexican crossed himself and said: "He is the devil. Stays in a tent. Came here from the big village on the Canadian. Captured by Dohasan with four other whites. Sold their lives for his. Setangya thinks he is big medicine. I wish he was in ——."

"That couldn't be Tom Reason. Sold their lives——"

"They come to bring us in," interrupted Garcia. "I have told you nothing about the gringo. Your eyes will tell you when you reach the village."

As he spoke he pointed to a band of horsemen emerging from the cover of a low bluff and bearing down upon them.

Anxious to appear eager to visit Sitting Bear and his people, Joe urged his horse forward at full speed. Garcia followed a few rods behind him, his dark face seamed with apprehension. There were a dozen warriors in the party, young men at the beginning of their careers. As they neared the trapper they divided so that he must ride between them.

Without hesitating, he drove straight ahead and as he passed through the line the braves wheeled about and fell in behind him to cut off any retreat. With figure erect, his face toward the smoke of the village now rising above a low hill, the trapper galloped on.

A brave dashed alongside, seized his bridle and screamed like a fiend. Joe did not appear to see him, but gave his mount both heels, causing the animal to leap violently ahead and nearly drag the Indian from his pony. As if discovering the man for the first time Joe checked his horse down to an easy canter, and in the Kiowa tongue greeted:

"I did not see my young red brother. I hope I did not hurt him."

"Why do you come to the Kiowa country?" demanded the infuriated brave.

"I come to talk with Setangya. I have no time to talk with his young men who get in my pony's way."

"I have sung the travel-song. I have taken the path against the *Tehaneko* (Texans.) I have killed the *Bedalpago* (hairy-mouths, or Americans). I have a green scalp."

"You are a *gua-dagya* (travel-song) man. You follow little paths," sneered the trapper. "I come to talk with a chief, who gives the pipe and follows long paths."

Not daring to murder the man on the way to talk with Sitting Bear, the young brave fell back to become the butt of his companions' wit. With never a glance at his escort Joe rode on by the ruins of Bent's old fort, a portion of the adobe walls and a chimney still standing.

The village consisted of thirty conical-shaped tents, the excellent grass and abundance of fuel being in decided contrast to the conditions at Timpas Creek. That it was a village and not a camp was proved to the trapper when women and children ran out to meet him.

Before these could surround the trapper another band of horsemen appeared, veteran warriors. Riding exquisitely, their trappings gay with plates of beaten silver and colored beads, they cut in ahead of the women. They were armed with bows and arrows and lances, while a few carried guns procured by trade or by raids into Mexico. They spread out as had the first band, and without glancing to right or left, the trapper rode into the village and leaped to the ground.

He was quickly surrounded by women and children, each wearing a new blue blanket. Three men with red blankets, as befitted sub-chiefs, haughtily remained in the background.

"Where is the white man?" the trapper inquired of Garcia.

The Mexican inclined his head toward a tent. The flap was pulled back and the trapper glimpsed a man seated cross-legged on a robe and throwing down cards, while an Indian wearing much toggery seemed to be trying to pick out a certain card. The white man had snow-white hair. The Mexican drew close to the trapper and hissed:

"Setangya asks the white man about his medicine. All these new blankets came from the white man's friends. They were killed. They were from California."

"Prob'ly takin' their stuff to new gold-diggin's," mumbled Joe to himself. "An' th' skunk must 'a' betrayed 'em."

Sitting Bear now rose and rearranged his red blanket and strode from the tent to meet the trapper. For a few moments he stared intently into the trapper's face, then seized his hand and shook it slowly and aired his Spanish with:

"Bueno. Mucho bueno."

Nor was this all; for next he passed his right arm through the trapper's right up to the elbow, so that they stood side by side and facing in opposite directions, and repeated his welcome. The maneuver was repeated with the other arm, and the ceremony was finished.

California Joe, more perturbed by this wealth of courtesy than he would have been by a scowling face and few words, expressed his good wishes in Kiowa and explained that he came to arrange for a trading-venture.

Sitting Bear was interested and said they must smoke. He ordered some women to unroll the robes in a large tent. Before this, the medicine tent, stood a pole and from it hung four scalps, all from the heads of white men. These were "green" and must have been contributed by the friends of the man now playing with a deck of cards in the near-by tent.

The trophies were guarded by an old woman, who was very proud of her office and very active in wielding a lance-staff when any women or children drew close to the pole.

Between this tent and the one containing the strange white man was tethered a cinnamon bear, nearly full grown. The Indian youths, to show off before the white man, began baiting the animal and endeavored to count coup by darting in and hitting the creature with the bare hand. The first youngster to make the attempt was ripped down the arm by the nimble claws. He drew himself up proudly, stalked to one side and stared off toward the horizon while a woman bound up his hurt.

To him the trapper remarked:

"Bill is big medicine. Next time he'll take your scalp."

The boy scowled venomously at the white man, then remembered he was a warrior in the making and assumed the stoical indifference of his elders.

"Beel?" queried Sitting Bear.

"The white man's name for a medicine bear," was the grave reply.

"The bear is medicine," readily agreed Sitting Bear. "The white man with white hair has a big medicine he spreads on a robe. His medicine says the Kiowa will be very big among all the tribes.

"You come to trade. The robes are spread. The pipe is ready. We will enter."

The trapper was loath to part with his rifle, but showed no hesitancy in leaving it at the opening. The chiefs placed their bows of *bois-d'arc* beside it. These like their pony-trappings were ornamented with brass tacks, pieces of silver and beads. From the discarded wolfskin quivers protruded steel-tipped arrows, which at short range were as deadly as a rifle-bullet. Joe had more respect for them than for the few flintlock smooth-bores stacked beside his own gun.

HE ENTERED first, followed by the Mexican, and seated himself on a robe opposite the entrance. As the chiefs did not come in for several minutes he became suspicious.

"Renewing their paint," murmured the Mexican.

"War-paint?"

"No, no. They are interested in your trade goods. My friend, there is not room for two traders here."

"All th' goods I've got ye can stick in yer eye an' not make it ache," assured Joe. "My partner'll be comin' along any day now. If ye see him first git to him an' tell him the lie I told the Bear. *Sabe?*"

"*Sí, señor.* It is what you call a game. The blankets they got when they killed the devil-man's friends spoiled my trade. If you brought goods——"

"But I ain't. Where'd this white skunk come from?"

"California. Over the old Spanish trail. He has an Indian with him who is queer here." And he touched his head. "The Indian is big medicine.

"The white man does magic with cards. He got his four friends to surrender to the Kiowas on promise their lives should be spared. Because he did that and does magic and because of the mad Indian traveling with him they let him live. Each day they believe his magic grows stronger. I am afraid he'll tell them to kill me and take my goods. He will go if he gets a chance. I will help him."

"Not very promising for me," mused the trapper.

"Very black unless they believe you have goods coming."

The flap of the tent was pulled aside and the four chiefs filed in, Sitting Bear in the lead. They had painted their faces a bright yellow and had marked the parting of their

long hair with vermilion. One of them, an old man, had his hair wrapped in skins, and the size of the rolls indicated its abnormal length. Garcia whispered it was Walking Wolf and that his hair was his medicine.

For several minutes the six men remained silent. Outside the old woman sang the story of the green scalps, breaking off to denounce those who ventured too close. The young men and boys continued tormenting the bear. In the tent beyond the white-haired man was building up a game of solitaire.

Sitting Bear at last gave an order and the pipe was brought. The old man who worshiped his hair smoked first, sending a puff toward the sun, then passing the pipe to Sitting Bear. The chief did likewise.

The other two saluted the sky and earth and four wind quarters. The Mexican, greatly agitated, drove his elbow into the trapper's side repeatedly.

"Let my ribs alone. I ain't blind," growled the trapper.

The Mexican took the pipe and before smoking chanted softly, as if making a new medicine; and his words were:

"Two smoked only to the sun, their big god. They make a spell to hurt you. The old man is a sorcerer."

CHAPTER II

RIVAL MEDICINES

WITH the smoking out of the way, Sitting Bear was impatient to learn where the trapper's goods were, offering to send his young men to bring them to the village. California Joe explained how his partner had gone to Bent's new post down the river to procure a new supply. He was careful to dwell on the likelihood of his partner's coming on ahead of the goods.

Sitting Bear was disappointed and eyed the trapper evilly. Then he asked about the gold discovery in Colorado, of which he had heard through the Arapahoes. Joe pretended ignorance, saying he was a trader and did not care to dig the ground like a squaw to get gold.

The chief abruptly began complaining that the Great Chief in Washington had given hair-metal (presents) to the Comanches, Arapahoes and Cheyennes and that the Kiowas had received nothing. Joe spoke of the new blankets worn by his people. The Bear promptly replied these were obtained in trade with Mexico.

The trapper next inquired about the white scalps outside, and was told these were taken from bad *Tehanekos*, who had attacked a Kiowa village. Then with a fine show of anger he loudly warned that there would be much trouble for the whites unless blue blankets were given to each member of the tribe, red ones for the chiefs, and plenty of calico for the women.

Realizing that this was a play to frighten him and that four pairs of eyes were watching for a sign of weakness, the trapper carelessly retorted that the Great Chief gave gifts to his friends, but never gave because he was threatened; that he had plenty of powder and balls for those who harmed his children.

Sitting Bear at once changed his demeanor and reiterated that the scalps on the pole belonged to the *Tehanekos*. Like nearly all the plains tribes in the central and southern districts the Kiowas assumed that the Texans were a separate race of white men from the hairy-mouths, or Americans. As an example of the Kiowas' love for the Americans the chief referred to the white card-player.

As to presents from the Great Chief, that was already arranged, or would be as soon as one of the tribe's leading men, Many Lances, had talked with the Indian agent at Bent's post. The village was waiting for Many Lances' return before going to hunt buffalo and combining with other villages in a war of extermination on the Pawnees.

The Kiowas were weary of war. They wished to walk in the white man's road and eat beef instead of buffalo. They would even stop their raids into Mexico if the Great Chief insisted upon it. If the Great Chief would be kind and very generous to his red children all would be perfect harmony before the grass was up in the next Leaf Moon and before the breasts of eagles began to turn white and panther-whelps were born.

While waiting for the Great Chief's presents, the trader's gifts would be very acceptable. Dohasan had been angry with the trader, but his heart would be warm and tender when he came back and found he had misjudged his white friend and when

he saw all his people carrying gifts received from the trader.

California Joe had no intention of overplaying his part, for his safety depended on making Sitting Bear believe trade goods were on the way. He quietly replied that while there were presents for the Kiowas in his bales, there would be nothing like gifts for all the men, women and children.

"For the Medicine Father," he added, turning to Walking Wolf, "is a medicine that will make his hair grow twice as long."

The old man grunted and said his hair had never been cut and that its charm was so strong it would turn aside bullets.

Sitting Bear reached across the robe and grasped the trapper's hand and eloquently pronounced him to be the Kiowas' blood brother. The Kiowas were a proud people and were tired of Pueblo Indian traders from Santo Domingo, who brought only flour and bread, for which they expected horses and robes. The white man should have all their trade and should remain with them until his goods came and the presents were distributed. But while waiting for his goods to arrive it would be very wise for him to keep close to the village, as bad Indians were prowling about who would kill him; then the Kiowas would be blamed by the Great Chief.

This meant the trapper was a prisoner in the village and would be safe until his goods came and were confiscated, or until it was known that no goods were on the way. The trapper bowed his thanks and the talk was finished.

"They'll drag your head," whispered Garcia as they emerged from the tent.

"Don't ye set up nights a-frettin' over me. All ye're to do is to meet my partner afore he meets any Injuns, an' tell him I'm still up in th' mountains, an' that he's to steer clear o' this village. If he knew I was here he'd be jest soft-headed 'nough to stick his head into th' mess; then there'd be two of us for me to git clear."

"They smoke to the sun! They make a spell over you!" shivered the Mexican. "Sitting Bear is as good medicine man as he is good fighting man."

"Got some pretty good medicine myself," growled California Joe. "An' I 'low I'll need it all afore another *kado* (sun-dance). Once th' Injuns see th' next gold-rush there'll be high —— to pay on these ol' plains. So t'other white man sold his friends to th' Kiowas to save his own ha'r, eh?"

"He told them to give up their guns, that the Kiowas were friendly. He talks Kiowa and had a talk with Sitting Bear first under a flag, his friends waiting."

THE trapper slowly advanced toward the tent of the card-player, but halted on beholding Sitting Bear making for the entrance. The chief was inside only a few minutes, and on reappearing, he walked up to the trapper and eyed him menacingly. The trapper lighted his pipe and sent a blue cloud into the chief's face, causing him to step back coughing.

"The man with white hair says you are bad medicine for the Kiowas," Sitting Bear informed him.

"He talks with a split tongue," was the calm reply. "He knows my medicine is stronger than his, and he is afraid. He wants my red brother to grow afraid and kill me."

"Can the white man stand up before a bullet and not be hurt?"

"Not now," returned the trapper, knowing an affirmative reply would bring a demand for a demonstration.

"With the Kiowa medicine a man can do that."

"Not when I fire the gun," firmly retorted the trapper.

"Can the white man's medicine kill a man many nights away?"

"It can," was the ready answer.

"Then kill the white man in there." And he pointed to the card-player's tent.

"Whites do not kill whites with white medicine," explained the trapper. "But let my red brother take his place and my magic power will kill him. When they drag his body out there will be no yellow paint on his face, but it will be burned as if he had been struck with fire from the sky."

Sitting Bear, inclined to be incredulous, yet not fully convinced it was empty boasting, thought over the challenge for sixty seconds, then grasped the trapper's two hands and said:

"My white brother, Head in the Sky, must stay a long time with the Kiowa. When his medicine is weak Walking Wolf, who will never die, will make it strong again for him."

With that he passed on. To test the situation the trapper idly sauntered toward

the herd of ponies on the edge of the village, where his own animal was grazing. A group of young braves strolled after him and became interested in watching the ponies. The trapper made a circuit of the village, and several men kept near him, while young men on their ponies raced each other and always kept between him and the plains.

"Sewed in here tighter'n a drum," he mused as he finished his reconnaisance.

His next desire was to have an interview with the white man. The Mexican's recital of the fellow's terrible blood-guilt had aroused Joe's ire, but he did not proceed direct to the tent.

Instead he loitered before the group baiting the bear. The animal was furious, and flecks of froth dropped from his gaping mouth as he sat on his haunches and waved his paws like a boxer.

A youth took advantage of his rage to run in behind him and strike him on the head. The bear whirled about, but the youth had danced out of reach. This was not counted a coup as the bear's attention was held by others.

The animal now fell to biting the rawhide rope, and another youth darted forward, tripped on a coil of rawhide and sprawled face down beside the brute. As quick as a cat the bear was upon him. The trapper snatched up the coil of rawhide and flung it into the creature's face, caught the youth by the foot and yanked him clear of the claws.

Then to the silent circle he said:

"The bear is too big medicine for boys to play with. Go and find a young wolf, or a buffalo calf. You try to run and fall down. You tie up a bear and call yourselves warriors if you hit him when he is not looking. See! This is the way to count coup."

He shot out his arm and recovered the coil of rawhide and hung it on his left arm. One end he took in his right hand, allowing several feet to hang free like a whip-lash. Then, boldly approaching the animal, he snapped the end of the rawhide against the sensitive nose. The bear brought both paws to his nose and the trapper leaped forward and struck him lightly, first with one palm, then with the other; then was back out of reach.

Pausing only long enough to secure his balance, he attacked again, the cord snapping the brute's nose, the two light blows being repeated. This he did several times, then walked on with a show of indifference. The spectacle had drawn nearly all the men about the bear, and after the trapper's withdrawal the crowd remained to see the young men try out the new method.

This was California Joe's opportunity, and raising the flap of a tent, he ducked inside. The white man sat on the robe, deftly manipulating a deck of cards. He did not glance up, but continued weaving the cards in and out, and then commenced placing them face up before him.

Back of him crouched the blanketed figure of an Indian, busily engaged in cutting notches on a stick. He did this with great swiftness, but as soon as he had cut five he would sigh dismally and throw up a hand with five fingers extended, then obliterate his tally with one sweep of the blade. Twice he went through this maneuver of cutting notches and shaving the stick smooth before California Joe remarked to the white man:

"Yew ain't goin' to git it. Buried yer kings."

Up jerked the white man's head, blue eyes blazing on the intruder; but the hands never ceased shuffling the cards and placing them down in groups of threes.

"The man Satank was telling about," he muttered. "How you called?"

"California Joe. Who might ye be?"

"Almost any one. Happens I'm called—or was before I quit white men in Frisco—Old Oakes."

"Gamblin' man?"

"Something like that."

"An' caught by these Injuns while travelin' west."

"Traveling east, —— the luck! Fool to quit the coast. Traveled to Taos with big party. Then through the Sangre de Cristo mountains with four friends. We was making for Colorado. Then we was jumped."

"Ye been tellin' Sitting Bear I'm bad medicine for him?" asked Joe.

The gambler laughed softly. "I'll tell them anything to keep my hair on. I told him a few days ago that he was the king of clubs and that the king of spades was his enemy. Now you come in with black hair and whiskers, and he reckons you're the king of spades.

"Couldn't let a heart or a diamond be his enemy, or that might turn him against *me*. Too bad to worry you, but it's all in the cards and the way they run."

"Hasn't worried me any," the trapper assured him. "Been in California long?"

"Since early forty-nine."

"I was there some considerable. Don't remember ye, nor yer name."

"You wouldn't 'less you was in Frisco and leaned toward green-topped tables."

"I see. What's th' matter with th' Injun? Never see a foolish one afore."

"Bad in the head. Pit River Indian. Fool enough to take his family down to the Sacramento. Double fool to find some gold. His folks, five of them, was rubbed out. He got shot in the head and went crazy. Ever since then he's been cutting notches on his stick."

"Poor devil!"

"Call him just plain devil. Treacherous and bloodthirsty trash. Ought to be all wiped out. They fix a stone arrowhead to a ten-inch stick with a bit of sinew. Shoot it into a man and blood softens the sinew and leaves the head in the wound. Bad business getting it out. But it really isn't worth trying as they first poison their arrowheads with rattlesnake venom. Pal of mine shot with one. Wasn't a bit pretty in dying."

"This feller's the only one left of his family," mused the trapper.

"Only one left," mechanically answered the gambler, beginning to deal the cards.

"Why'd ye bother to take him along with ye?"

"He's my luck. Stood behind me when we played for the gold. I had the devil's own luck——"

"Ye ought to," broke in the trapper.

"—and I cleaned up. Got the notion he was lucky to have around. Went down the valley. Usually had a winning streak when Pete—my name for him—stood back of me. Every gambler is more or less foolish about his luck, you know."

"So I've heard tell. Never entered yer noodle, did it, that it might bring bad luck to wipe out a parcel of Injuns jest to git a few ounces o' dust?"

OAKES looked up in surprize, his face growing hard.

"—— me, but if you ain't one of them missionary sharps. Them Pit River Indians any relation of yours? Better men than you have been careful not to dip their paws into my dish."

"Had my paws in quite a few dishes and never had my claws clipped yet. So ye're Old Oakes, gambler. Frisco man. Queer I never heard of ye. Queer ye should quit yer reg'lar stampin'-grounds an go' ramblin' up in that forsaken country. 'Course, ye couldn't have known when ye started that ye'd have a fine chance to murder five poor devils."

"It would be queerer if you meddled much more in my affairs and lived to tell about it," whispered Oakes.

California Joe leaned on his rifle and stared at the self-confessed murderer closely. Then he shifted his attention to the Indian. The latter had not suspended his work, and the stick was whittled to bits.

As if possessing eyes in the back of his head, Oakes tossed a cottonwood branch over his shoulder. The Indian seized it and began cutting more notches, the knife traveling with incredible swiftness in making ten cuts, or five notches. Then the blade flashed down the wood and a new record was commenced.

"Ever strike ye that that chap is tryin' to count coup, a notch for every death his crazy brain is plannin'?"

"He can't count above five," mumbled the gambler, now frowning over a combination of face-cards. "Curse it! You show up in my pile every time. I'm in diamonds, and here's you, the king of spades.

"This tent ain't big enough for the two of us. This village ain't big enough for both of us, either."

"I ain't here for a smoke-talk. Jest to size ye up. When we're both clear o' this place I'm going to run across yer luck some day an' spile it. I know all about yer dirty tricks, an' how ye sold four white men an' their goods to save yer own mis'rable hide."

With a snarl the gambler thrust his hand inside his woolen shirt, but the long barrel of a Colt revolver sent the hand back to the cards.

"An' it won't happen that way, neither," resumed the trapper. "Ever try to draw on me ag'in an' I'll pot ye if my head's dragged th' next second.

"My business with ye jest now is to tell ye to quit makin' me out bad medicine to th' Kiowas, or I'll start some medicine that'll hang yer ha'r up on their scalp-pole. Plenty of squaws in this camp that's crazy to add another stripe to their leggin's. Th'

one whose man wipes ye out has that right, ye know."

"Now I'll say that even all the Colorado country ain't big enough for the two of us," murmured Oakes.

"Prob'ly th' first true word ye've spoke in years," commented Joe. "Wal, th' plains is some roomy; but we'll have to travel quite some considerable distance apart or my ol' gun will have a new notch on it."

"The sooner you drop dead the better I'll like it. I promise myself to be on hand when you die."

"Thank ye kindly. Jest remember my medicine is goin' to eat yers up," warned the trapper as he backed from the tent.

His last view of the interior was that of the sallow-faced gambler dealing the cards and the Indian feverishly hacking notches in his stick.

AS HE turned to walk back to where the Kiowas were teasing the bear Garcia sidled up to him and whispered:

"Setangya believes the white-hair has very big medicine. He throws down cards and Sitting Bear can not pick up the one he wants even when he sees just where it falls."

"Bah! I can throw 'em, too. Not so cute as him as he's been doin' nothin' else all his life, but cute 'nough to fool a Injun."

"It would be good if you could do it better than he," was the ominous rejoinder. "If you should die of the white hair's medicine the Kiowas would say they had nothing to do with it. When your trade goods come your friend might die the same way; then the Kiowas would have much goods."

California Joe combed his fingers through his beard and muttered:

"So that's Sitting Bear's game, eh? Git Oakes to kill me. Then jump Tommy when he comes an' take the goods. But there ain't no goods. Still if I'm dead by th' time Tommy comes without goods th' joke will be on me, I reckon."

To Garcia he boldly said:

"I'll show him some medicine he can't fool with. Jest a Digger Injun gamblin'-trick. Learned it when campin' on Little Butte Crick near Feather River. Bucks used to play it while the squaws sat on top o' their mud huts shellin' out grain. They git so worked up over it they'll sweat like a hoss mired in a swamp. An' they'd bet everything they had, even their squaws an' younkers.

"Kindly git me a big batch o' dry grass or straw, an' a couple pieces of white wood or bone, an' whisper in Sitting Bear's ear he'd better go slow in foolin' with white medicine an' make sure first what medicine is th' strongest, mine or that skunk's. Or he'll find hisself tied up to a mighty weak article."

"*Sí, señor!* A duel of the medicines," eagerly cried Garcia as he hastened away to obtain the desired material.

That he paused to drop a word to Sitting Bear was indicated by the chief's appearance in the little square where the bear was hitched. Coming up to California Joe, he began—

"Hits the Sky is a medicine man, they say."

"I have a very big medicine, but I use it only when among enemies. I have a small medicine that Setangya may watch work."

"The white-hair has a very strong magic."

"Oh, my small medicine is stronger than his best," quietly assured Joe.

"The Kiowas will see which is the biggest medicine," said Sitting Bear; and he spread his blanket and sat down.

California Joe knew the test had come and that he must oppose his skill to the gambler's. He could appreciate why Oakes should desire his death. Even the plains and mountains were all too small for a white man to mingle with white men when there was one to accuse him of betraying four companions to a bloody death.

As a gambler Oakes must frequent the busiest centers, and in none would he be safe while every cross-current of drifting humanity might bring the one man who knew and who would publish his perfidy. Because of self-preservation alone the gambler must see to it that no witnesses against him left the Kiowa camp.

Sitting Bear had imposed certain conditions on Oakes. If his medicine should be what he claimed he must prove it by destroying the white man. The test had been arranged even before the Mexican had whispered it to the trapper.

Joe seated himself opposite the chief and waited for the gambler to join them. A side glance revealed the immobile face of the gambler at the opening of the tent, but he did not come forth. Affecting not to see him, the trapper stared at the red sun wallowing in a cloud-bank.

"My eyes are open," grunted Sitting Bear after a few minutes of waiting.

The trapper continued his study of the western horizon until Garcia came back with a bundle of dry grass and two small pieces of bone. Behind the trader streamed men, women and children; for the word was passed that Hits the Sky was a magician, whose magic would eat up the medicine of the white-hair, or else he would be killed.

Arranging the dry grass beside him and holding the pieces of bone in his right hand, the trapper said to Sitting Bear,

"Your eyes are sharp? If little birds flew up at your feet, all black except one which was white, and then flew to the ground to hide, your eyes could follow the trail of the white bird?"

"I am of the *kaitsenko*. I carry the medicine arrow in battle. Does a blind man do that?"

"Then look!" And the trapper extended the bits of bone for the chief to examine. "These are the little white birds."

And he tossed them in the air that all might see. Tossing up some of the dried grass, he continued:

"Here are the feathers the birds shall wear. I shall send little birds flying one at a time. The bones in this hand will pass into some of the feathers. The sharp eyes of Sitting Bear shall see which bundle they enter and he shall pick out that grass bird when it falls to the ground."

The chief grunted in disgust at such childish play.

"If that is the medicine of Hits the Sky then the Kiowas are sad for they know the white-hair's medicine will eat it up, and we shall have a white man to hide in the ground."

The trapper smiled grimly and dexterously twisted some of the dead grass and tossed it into the air. Sitting Bear's gaze never left the hand holding the pieces of bone. The trapper worked more rapidly, sending up the wisps of grass until three were in the air at once.

Sitting Bear jeered:

"The medicine is very weak. Hits the Sky has spilled water in it. He does not dare wrap up the bone."

Smiling broadly, Joe opened his hand. One piece of bone was missing. Exclamations arose from the intensely interested spectators. The chief sternly accused—

"You dropped it between your legs!"

The trapper pointed to a twisted bit of grass close to the chief's knee. The chief snatched it up, and for a moment his expressionless face betrayed chagrin as his fingers felt a hard substance inside the grass. Reluctantly opening the grass, he came to the piece of bone. Deep silence fell.

Holding up the remaining bone for all to see, the trapper selected three bunches of grass, and all knew the bone was to take flight in one of these.

Sitting Bear breathed heavily and leaned forward and concentrated his attention. Joe selected a twist of grass and, seemingly using only the tips of his fingers, formed it into a compact mass and sent it flying from his left hand. The remaining two followed in quick succession, only there was the slightest trace of awkwardness in rolling the third.

Sitting Bear shouted, "*Tonsip!*" (bones) and triumphantly plucked the last decoy from the air. The spectators hurled gibes at the white man. Then the expression on the chief's face stilled their scoffing. Their great leader had been baffled for the second time. They knew it before he tore open the grass and found nothing.

With a snarl of rage Sitting Bear snatched up the second wisp, and this too was empty. The trapper had concealed the bone in the first decoy.

LEAPING to his feet, the chief shouted for Oakes to come forward and display his medicine. The gambler advanced, cards in hand. Sitting Bear motioned him to be seated. For a few moments the trapper stared at the picture framed by the opening of the tent, that of the fierce face of the Pit River Indian bowed over his notched stick.

"Now we'll see that medicine of yours that's to eat me up," jeered the gambler.

"Jest a simple little trick. Prob'ly ye know all 'bout it," mumbled Joe as he gathered the grass close to one knee and opened his hand to show the two pieces of bone. "I sorter twist some grass round the bones an' ye're to guess which bundle o' grass has th' bone."

"I know. I've been watching you. Go ahead. You'll find it different from fooling these idiots."

"Words to warm Sittin' B'ar's heart if he could catch 'em," said Joe, diffidently selecting some grass and fumbling it into a

little ball and throwing it down before the gambler. "How much ye bet it ain't in that one?"

"Go ahead! Only one bet in this game—your life against mine. You're too mouthy to be running loose and giving me a bad name."

"So I've heard tell," said Joe, twisting up three birds with marvelous celerity and scattering them on the blanket.

A muscle twitched nervously in the gambler's face. He was perturbed. The first clumsy essay had caused him to relax a bit, although he knew the show of awkwardness was assumed. But he had expected it to be repeated. The three lightning-like movements had caught him off his guard for the fraction of a second, and infinitesimal as was the opening it was sufficient for doubt to enter through. He was positive one of the bones had been cast. Reaching forward and depending on his "luck," he selected a wisp of grass, and it was empty. Sitting Bear coughed in his throat; the circle tightened and contracted.

"Send the other one," harshly commanded the gambler.

Joe rolled it slowly and dropped it on the blanket and then opened his right hand. The hand was empty. Oakes darted one glance of admiration and fell to studying the problem. Was it a bluff? Would he encase the bone in this last twist of grass and then show that his hands were empty? The act invited an inspection of the last decoy. That would indicate the bone was not there. On the other hand the trapper might venture the bold course of placing it there, thinking his opponent would suspect the bait and refuse to choose it.

"Is it, or ain't it?" challenged Joe, producing his pipe and lighting it.

"You got me guessing," mumbled Oakes; "but you'll never get me any other way. You wouldn't dare risk the bone in that last one, for only one of us quits this village alive. And yet—and yet——"

"'Zactly. An' yet I might jest be th' kind of a cuss what would dare," chuckled Joe.

"—— you! I believe you're trying to bluff me, and that the bone's in there at that."

He grabbed up the wisp of grass and found nothing.

To complete his triumph Joe pointed his pipe-stem to the first grass he had twisted.

"I asked ye once how much ye'd bet it wa'n't in that one," reminded the trapper.

With an oath the gambler scattered the grass and the bone was there. Guttural cries ran around the circle. Sitting Bear's wisdom was not belittled by a white man's success.

"Now I will show my medicine!" cried Oakes, realizing he must do something at once to regain his prestige with the chief; and he held up the deck of cards and shuffled them in and out with amazing deftness.

His promptness dulled the edge of the trapper's success. However, he knew he must score as decisively as had his opponent.

And as he performed various feats of legerdemain his active mind was picturing the result of failure. Even if he escaped from the village he believed it would be only to meet the trapper in the gold-diggings, where the story of the slaughtered white men and his own freedom would place a hasty noose round his neck.

Smothering his imagination and holding himself down to cold efficiency, he held up the king of spades and two diamonds, so that all might see. Tapping the spade, he pointed it at the trapper, indicating that the card stood for him. Then he placed them face down between the thumb and middle finger, a space of half an inch between each two, and again exposed them so that the spectators might behold the king on the bottom.

Sitting Bear squatted on his heels, intensely interested. He had been repeatedly fooled in trying to follow the card when it was thrown. The trick fascinated him.

The trapper nodded for Oakes to proceed. The gambler held his two hands close together for a moment without disturbing the position of the cards and stared at the zenith.

Joe watched the two hands. Then with a quickness that baffled the eye the cards were thrown one at a time, but with such rapidity that one card barely settled on the blanket before another was beside it. Smiling grimly at the trapper, the gambler invited—

"Now pick it out, you man who tells about eating up your betters."

THE trapper turned up the card nearest to him. It was a diamond. The Indians yelped in derision. Oakes swept up the cards and threw them again, this time slowly, as if to challenge the

evidence of the trapper's eyes by his very deliberation. There was none around the circle who would not have wagered his last pony that the cards were thrown in order, the spade first, then the middle and top cards.

With a slight smile Joe picked up the last card down. It was a diamond. Now the Indians jeered the trapper for being a fool, and many fingers were pointed at the first card down.

"Your grass medicine looks mighty small," laughed Oakes. "I told you there wasn't room for the two of us in this camp."

"An' I said there wasn't room for two of us in th' mountains or on th' plains," calmly reminded Joe. "Shoot 'em ag'in. I begin to git th' hang of it. Ye don't throw 'em down as I 'lowed ye did. Ye fool me a purpose."

"You blockhead! You talk as crazy as that Indian of mine acts. Once more just to show the chief you're second fiddle."

"Wait a minute!" requested the trapper. "Ye palmed th' king t'other times. That's why it wa'n't no use for me to choose. Ye've palmed it on th' chief all along, or he'd pick it sometimes, jest by accident."

And he plucked the three cards from the gambler's hand and glanced them over. Handing them back, he warned:

"Don't smooch th' king an' ring in another in its place. Now, let 'em flicker."

Oakes threw them very close together this time, the motion of his hand masking their fall somewhat. California Joe turned to Sitting Bear and said:

"My medicine can work through the great chief. Sitting Bear shall pick out the black man as my medicine directs.

"My medicine asks Sitting Bear to catch this bit of grass and throw it toward the sun. Good! My medicine tells me to take this card toward the cold north and put it to one side. Now let the chief rest the tip of a finger on each of the other two cards. Good! My medicine says so."

Sitting Bear lightly rested his finger-tips on the two remaining cards and stared at the trapper. Oakes' face was murderous, and only the fact the chief was participating in the contest restrained him from blood-stained violence. In a loud voice the trapper announced—

"Uncover a card by lifting a hand, Setangya!"

Up came a hand, then darted back and exposed the card. It was the king of spades.

"—— you!" gritted Oakes while the spectators were exclaiming in huge delight and attributing much of the success of the feat to the chief's own medicine. "You marked that card with your thumbnail. Oh, I saw it at once. But I couldn't say anything without teaching the Indians to do the same. You made sure he was right-handed and would lift his right hand by tossing that grass for him to catch."

"Ye can read a trail a bit after all," chuckled Joe. " 'Course, ye couldn't 'ford to teach 'em how to mark cards. For then they'd see ye had palmed th' bottom card. I had ye both ways."

They were interrupted by Sitting Bear's forcing his way between them and haughtily announcing:

"Hits the Sky says his medicine helped me find the black man. It is a lie! The Kiowa medicine did it. My medicine swells and grows inside of me."

He paused and thumped his chest.

"I will pick out the black man without any help of the white medicine. I have said it—Setangya, who carries the medicine arrow of the *paitsenko!*"

Oakes grinned evilly at the trapper and murmured:

"Here's where your medicine takes a slump. I'm going to let him pick it."

The trapper hooked his thumbs in his belt, his right hand resting on his revolver, and murmured, "Jest as sure as he picks it I'm going' to throw a hunk o' lead through yer heart, ye —— murderer. Palm that keerd or take th' trail to th' Many Wigwams!"

Blue eyes blazed into black, the cunning hands fluttering the cards in a miracle of deceit. Suddenly the right hand was motionless for a moment; then the cards fell slowly. Sitting Bear exclaimed in great content and picked up a card and without looking at it held it above his head and revolved so that his men might behold the triumph of his medicine.

California Joe waited without shifting his gaze from the gambler's set face, the fingers of his right hand closing around the butt of the Colt. The lack of acclaim prompted the chief to glance at his choice. It was a diamond. But only when the card fell within the trapper's line of vision did his fingers relax their grip.

"Fooled him, didn't ye?" he remarked.

Oakes snarled something profane and swept up the cards. Sitting Bear angrily commanded him to throw them again. Once more the chief was positive his eyes had not deceived him and he pounced upon a card only to register a second failure. The third attempt sickened him; and, gathering up his blanket, he stalked away.

"There, —— you!" hoarsely mumbled Oakes. "I've given you a reputation and you'd best make the best of it. For if you live to get clear of this village and I ever meet up with you there'll never be a third meeting."

"Ye oughter had yer Injun standin' back o' ye for luck," taunted the trapper. "I reckon he's been watchin' ye, only he wa'n't close 'nough to fetch ye any luck."

The gambler swung about and beheld the Pit River Indian crouching in the opening of the tent, his knife and notched stick idle for once, his eyes staring at the two white men. California Joe picked up a wisp of grass and tossed it into the air, and the Indian's eyes grew big as they followed it. His fingers mechanically went through the motion of twisting grass and throwing it; then he ducked back from view.

Oakes jumped to his feet and hastened to the tent.

"Derned if that Injun ain't beginnin' to remember things," mused the trapper. "He's gambled at th' grass game 'mong th' diggers. His own people prob'ly play it, too. Made him think o' home. If he gits his senses back he'll be mighty poor medicine for Oakes to be totin' round."

WITH the exhibition ended, the Kiowas withdrew to their tents or to plaguing the bear—all with the exception of half a dozen braves who lounged in the background as guards over the white man. Garcia came strolling around a tent, lounged up to the trapper and pretended to amuse himself by playing with the dry grass. As he twisted it and tossed it about he softly informed Joe:

"You did well, *señor*. Setangya does not know what to do. He believes you have a strong medicine, yet he wants to have you out of the way before the goods come. If you are killed in the village it will be by the other white man. The Kiowas will say you two fought before they could stop you. Yet Setangya does not like the way your medicine made him pick out a card when his own can not help him.

"The man Oakes offers me gold to hide ponies for him. He plans to run away."

"He's sure to run where I'll meet him some time," philosophically replied Joe. "He's scum. Never thought to dance a white sculp, but there ain't 'nough calumets on the plains to make peace between us.

"Help him git clear if ye can. I must stick till I hear from my friend; an' th' camp's crowded with two white men in it."

CHAPTER III

TOM REASON ARRIVES

THAT night California Joe occupied a tent near the post to which the cinnamon bear was hitched. The bear's tether permitted him to approach almost within reach of the flap; but, wearied by the continual baiting, the poor brute was glad to rest and did not disturb the trapper's slumbers.

On awakening, Joe reviewed the situation and weighed the advisability of attempting to escape down the river. The one point against flight was the chance of passing his partner and the likelihood of the latter's blundering on to the village.

With almost any other of the plains tribes the trapper would have felt small concern. With the exception of the Kiowa he was sure to find old acquaintances in almost every village.

Colonel Sumner's pursuit of some of the plains Indians in the Spring of the preceding year—a chase which had led six troops of the old First Cavalry up the Arkansas to Bent's new post, where the Cheyenne annuities were seized—had not aroused the Indians to a pitch precluding peace. With the exception of the Kiowas the tribes of the Central Plains were not disposed to war.

Early in the Summer of '58 Indian Agent Miller reported that the Cheyennes were ready to sign a peace treaty. The Arapahoes, too, were tired of war. But Dohasan would have none of such soft talk. The Comanches, ancient allies of the Kiowas, would, in part at least, follow their old friends. Even so, with peace established between the government and the other tribes, the two recalcitrant tribes could

soon be brought to book or pushed far back into the staked plains, where they could do but little mischief.

But this new discovery of gold in the Colorado mountains was bound to bring more trouble to the Indians and greatly excite them. Each hour the news was spreading, and once the whites began to react, as they always did react to the call of the yellow metal, California Joe knew there would be few Indian camps or villages where a white man would be safe.

One slim ray of hope entered his meditations as he reclined on his robes and pondered over the matter. If Many Lances, sent by Sitting Bear to smoke with the government officials, could complete his errand before any great rush of gold-hunters disturbed the delicate balance, it might be possible to hold the Kiowas in line. At the worst their activities could be minimized.

"Thank th' Lawd th' Sioux ain't got het up under th' collar," he rejoiced as he quit his couch and performed his toilet by running his fingers through his hair and beard.

He decided he was very hungry, and as no offer of food had been made he went forth to forage. Selecting a large tent, which he knew must belong to Sitting Bear, he entered and beheld the chief reclining on some robes with the remnants of breakfast before him.

The trapper seated himself opposite the chief, lighted his pipe and extended it for the other to smoke a few ceremonial puffs. Sitting Bear puffed twice to the sun, a sorcerer's invocation, the Mexican had said, then coughed as the strong weed strangled him. Recovering his breath, the chief motioned to a woman, who brought a large piece of elk-meat, burned to a crisp on one side and barely warmed through on the other.

As the trapper commenced eating, Old Oakes entered and took his place on the chief's right. He was quickly supplied with meat, which he ate sparingly. After he had consumed but a small portion of his helping and had indicated that he was through, Sitting Bear appropriated the remainder and soon devoured it. Oakes took no notice of the trapper, but Joe was difficult to ignore.

"How's yer loony Injun friend this mornin'?" he blandly asked.

"None of your —— business," gently answered Oakes.

"If we jest consarned ourselves with what was our business there wouldn't be any tradin', stealin' hosses, other men's wives, or gamblin'," genially replied the trapper. "Then ag'in if we all 'tended our own business ye wouldn't 'a' pushed yer nose into my game yesterday an' gone an' lost yer medicine."

"We ain't done with each other yet," warned the gambler. "No man can rub Old Oakes against the grain and prosper."

"Ye don't say! Then hear this: When I rub ye th' wrong way I'll lift ha'r an' hide. I'm bad if ye git atween me an' my victuals or pipe. I'm rank pizen when I meet a murderer."

Before the gambler could retort Sitting Bear commented—

"White men's hearts are bad."

Though unable to follow the swift exchange of words he had sensed hostility.

"Remember I don't like you," warned the gambler with a frosty smile as he rose and wiped his hands on a bunch of dry grass.

"Ill be keen to remember," returned the trapper.

Oakes walked from the tent and Sitting Bear, staring after him, shrewdly observed:

"White men do not smoke together. Make war medicines against each other."

"He's angry because my medicine is stronger than his," explained the trapper. "He knows his medicine will turn against him. His medicine is telling him it failed because he made no feasts for it."

"His medicine will be strong again when he kills you?" artlessly inquired the chief.

"He can not kill me," firmly replied the trapper. "He knows it."

"It is very bad for white brothers to fight. If he kills you the Kiowas will have heavy hearts."

"Hits the Sky knows that," Joe gravely assured him. "Is it safe for your white brother to ride down the river and look for his friend who went for the trade goods?"

"Very bad," replied Sitting Bear, shaking his head as if disconsolate. "Some of my wild young men ran away last night and will be hiding along the river road, looking for a stripe to give their squaws to wear on their leggings. Stay in the village while my older men go find them and bring them in.

"Soon they will go to Mexico for scalps and horses. Then my brother will be free as a bird."

"It is good. Setangya's heart is warm," declared Joe, rising and quitting the tent with the knowledge that he was still a prisoner.

He repaired to the outskirts of the village and once more found that a dozen young bucks had business there. They did not interfere with him nor draw too close, but when they were not lounging and smoking they were racing their ponies directly in front of him. He soon perceived that the chief's statement about some of his young men being absent was a lie.

With nothing better to do while he marked time he returned to the cinnamon bear and passed an hour watching the youths continue their efforts to count coup. He observed that several had copied his tactics of the day before, and by flirting the rawhide cord against bruin's nose were able to jump in occasionally and successfully register their daring.

ONE young villain, barely able to toddle around, approached within a few feet of the trapper and discharged a blunt-nosed arrow at him. This attack was vociferously applauded by the onlookers, and the child's eyes took on the same stealthy, malevolent expression as that to be observed in his elders. Joe smoked on as if ignorant of what was going on about him.

A larger boy snatched up a bow and drew an arrow to the head. Nor was this one of the blunt arrows used by the children in knocking over birds and other small game, but a hunting-arrow with lance-like head. Without moving a muscle except to part his lips in speaking, the trapper quietly warned:

"If you shoot that arrow I'll take you by the neck and whip you with the rawhide until you can't sit on a pony. Remember, whipped before all your people and none of them, not even your head chief, can stop me. Now go ahead and shoot."

The boy gritted his teeth and trembled all over at the indignity put upon him. A whipping, however, among people who never corrected the most wayward of their young, was an unspeakable indignity. And there was something in the trapper's dark eyes which convinced the youngster that the threat would be made good.

This beast of a white man, shaggy as a bull buffalo before losing his Winter coat, did magic. His medicine had been stronger than that of the other white man, who was Sitting Bear's friend. He did not shout his words, and yet all within hearing believed he would do as he said.

The taut bow slowly relaxed, the arrow dropping to the ground. The boy turned and fled as if chased by the devil. It would require many boyish coups to wipe out the disgrace of that flight.

A young warrior pranced forward with a war-shield and propped it up in front of the trapper as if to protect him from the assaults of the children. This amused the spectators immensely, and many were the gibes and insults hurled at the white man. Realizing that there could be no satisfaction in trying to answer a hooting mob, the trapper picked up the shield, gravely thanked the young man and strode away.

Under a pretense of watching the pony herd he started again for the outskirts of the village to watch for the coming of Tom Reason. He had passed Old Oakes' tent when his steps were halted by something striking against the shield on his back.

His first thought was that some child had taken a shot at him. But on facing about and swinging the shield to the front he was surprized to behold an arrow that was entirely different from any used by the Kiowas, or by any of the plains tribes for that matter. The head was barbed in shape and made of obsidian instead of iron. A deer-sinew held the head to a ten-inch foreshaft of hard wood, which in turn was inserted in a reed and further secured by sinew.

The reed was tipped with feathers, and so slightly had the head penetrated the shield that even while the trapper was staring at it it fell to the ground.

With a growl of rage Joe plucked a long-butcher-knife from his belt and ran toward Old Oakes' tent; but before he could reach it the flap was thrown back and the gambler kneeled in the opening, a long pistol covering the trapper, a bowie-knife being clutched in the other hand. To add to the tableau, Sitting Bear and Walking Wolf, the medicine man who worshiped his hair, came around the tent and with a glance took in the situation. Sitting Bear shouted to his warriors, who appeared from all sides as if by magic and ran in between the two white men. The trapper

replaced his knife and the gambler restored his weapons to his belt.

"You come to kill the white-hair," accused Sitting Bear.

The trapper knew the chief believed nothing of the sort. He strongly suspected that the chief's presence near the tent was no accident, but was planned to witness the killing of one white man by another. The promptness with which his men responded to his call indicated that the homicide had been thoroughly rehearsed. Pointing to the arrow and touching the insignificant puncture in the shield, Joe replied:

"He shot at me while I was standing with my back to his tent. If it had not been for this shield over my shoulders I would be a dead man.

"Let your warriors be careful how they handle that arrow. The head has been dipped in the venom of a rattlesnake."

"How is this?" asked Sitting Bear, the lines about his mouth deepening as he glared at Oakes. "You have shot an arrow at my white brother?"

"He lies!" cried Oakes.

Reaching behind him, he dragged the Pit River Indian forward and announced:

"This man shot the arrow. He was making his medicine. The *Cornucoya* (American) stood before the tent and tried to work magic against my medicine brother. That made this man very angry. His medicine told him to kill the white man.

"If he did wrong he will answer to the Great Spirit who has placed a hand on his head. He will not answer to the Kiowa."

Sitting Bear stared at the blank visage of the Pit River man and gave ground. The unfortunate creature was several stages below the Kiowa in advancement, but his mental plight made him an associate with spirits.

"It is well. He can do no wrong. The white man should not cast a shadow on his tent when he makes medicine," ruled the chief.

"The white man lies, Setangya!" wrathfully cried California Joe. "He will go away and tell other white men how he made a fool of you, how like a little child you were. Look at that spot on the shield. If the Indian fired that arrow would it make only a scratch on the hide and then fall to the ground? Ho, you boy!"

And, stepping aside, he seized by the shoulder the boy who had threatened him with the hunting-arrow. Taking the Pit River arrow from a warrior's hand, he sprang to the opening of the tent and before Oakes could interfere snatched a strung bow from the nerveless grasp of the crazy Indian. This was three feet in length, of soft wood reinforced with deer-sinew. The string, also, was of sinew.

Handing the bow to the startled boy, he set the shield up at twice the distance he had stood when fired upon. Then he gave the arrow to the youngster, warning him not to scratch himself on the barb, and directed him to show he was a warrior by hitting the shield. Oakes would have interfered, and even Sitting Bear was not wholly pleased. But the Kiowas, ever loving an exhibition, cried loudly for the boy to shoot.

The trapper raised a hand for silence and said:

"This boy will shoot at the shield. He has never handled a bow and arrow like these. Yet he will make the shield sick. *Tuquois*—shoot!"

Proud of the opportunity to figure in such a spectacle and in a great measure redeem himself in the eyes of his young companions, the boy exerted his strength to the utmost and pulled the string nearly to his ear before releasing the arrow. The arrow sped true and the obsidian head sank well into the tough hide.

"*Tusenow* (good)! Did the Indian, who has always used this bow, or the clumsy white man shoot the arrow at me?" demanded the trapper.

THERE was not a Kiowa present who did not believe the trapper's accusation. There was none there who did not admire the trapper's cunning in using the boy to demonstrate the truth of his charges.

And yet what did the Kiowas care if two white men, both prisoners, should fall out and try to kill each other? This sentiment was mockingly expressed by the aged Walking Wolf and heartily indorsed by all the braves.

Another spoke up and declared that the white-hair did right in trying to kill the man who was making the Pit River Indian's medicine weak. If white-hair fired the arrow it was at the request of his red companion. Therefore in effect it was the

Indian who sent the shaft, the white-hair being his fingers and arms.

Look at the Indian now! He has forgotten everything but his magic with the stick. *Pahco, gia, pao, iaki*—five notches! Now a *swish* of the knife and the stick has lost its teeth and he must begin all over again.

The Great Spirit had put Hits the Sky and white-hair out of his thoughts. Very good; the Kiowas would have no further business with the matter. If the Indian shot at the white man it was the will of the Great Spirit. If the white man, acting for the Indian, tried to kill the trapper, it was well and good.

California Joe tugged at his beard and smiled grimly. Rage at the attempt on his life had blinded him for a moment. Now his vision was clear: Oakes had been directed to dispose of the white man or else take his place as victim. The homicide had been carefully staged, Sitting Bear and his followers waiting behind the tents for their cue to rush to the scene and behold the trapper dead and then stand as witnesses to the innocence of the Kiowas in the killing.

"An' me tryin' to argufy with th' skunks!" the trapper told himself in great disgust. "Next time he'll use a bullet an' swear his Injun friend spit it out of his mouth. I jest got to wipe that cuss out or become a cold corpse. An' if I wipe him out then they'll do th' same to me an' swear Oakes killed me afore he died.

"But if Oakes was to git clear an' run for it— Garcia says he wants to. Offered him some gold to git ponies for him. Reckon it's high time for Garcia to hide th' ponies."

His meditations were interrupted by Sitting Bear's ironical reminder:

"You white men should remember you are brothers. How can you ask the red man to take you as brothers when you fight among yourselves? Let there be no killing among you. Remember we are all children of the Great Spirit."

Walking Wolf turned aside to conceal a smile. Oakes leered at the trapper and informed him:

"If you try any funny work on me the chief will skin you alive. If you're tempted to shoot me be sure and save a bullet for yourself."

"An' if ye kill me, as the B'ar has told ye to do, don't think for a second ye'll git free. Th' chief will turn ye over to th' whites as a murderer, an' be rid o' both of us."

"He won't dare harm me. He's afraid of my medicine."

"He won't hurt yer Injun friend, but he'll have that white ha'r of yers flapping from th' point of his lance, or he'll turn ye over to be shot at Bent's new post."

The gambler weighed these words thoughtfully, and finally said:

"I'm inclined to believe you're right. Our quarrel can wait. Yet one thing's certain: I must either kill you or quit this hole."

"I'm hankerin' to stay a while. Got a friend comin'. I'll tell Garcia to hide them ponies ye was after."

Oakes' eyes sparkled.

"Get him to do that and the rest will be easy. They let me and the Indian go to the river alone. They think he is renewing his medicine. They're not afraid of our jumping the village so long as we're afoot.

"Tell the Mexican to hide the ponies two miles up-stream and I'll do the rest. Better act mad and quit me now. They're trying to get what we're saying."

Joe at once became very angry and cursed the gambler roundly, then turned away and went in search of the Mexican. He found Garcia huddled behind a tent, smoking tobacco rolled in a cornhusk, and to him related the incident of the arrow.

"Ah, that white-hair! He has the heart of the devil. Did I not say he was the devil? He will be killing me next," groaned Garcia.

"He will leave the camp if you will hide two ponies two miles up the river. Get about it at once. The Kiowas smell blood an' they'll have a killing mighty soon if they have to do it themselves."

"I go to find my missing pony, *señor*," announced the Mexican, rising and making for the herd.

The trapper entered the village and observed that the Indians were still grouped before Oakes' tent. From the back of the crowd he satisfied himself that neither Sitting Bear nor Walking Wolf was present. Then the boy who had shot at the shield boastfully informed him:

"Setangya and old Walking Wolf go tc try the white man's medicine. Walking Wolf has made a feast to his hair and says

his eyes can see through a bull-hide. The white-hair can not hide the black man from him."

"Goin' to pick out the king o' spades, eh?" mused Joe, smiling whimsically. Then aloud he shouted:

"Palm it on 'em, ye skunk! If they guess it yer goose is cooked."

Oakes' head popped through the opening and he cried—

"A —— of a lot that would bother you!"

"Jest 'bout that much, if it wouldn't make 'em so proud that they'd 'low they was primed to make a clean sweep an' crag *my* head," replied the trapper.

Oakes dodged back inside and the crowd waited. The minutes grew into an hour before the flap was thrown back for Sitting Bear and Walking Wolf to emerge. No word was needed to tell that the aspirants for medicine honors had been defeated.

Oakes' face at the opening, more sallow than ever and marked with streaks of sweat, grinned in triumph. Sitting Bear wrapped his blanket close about him although the day was hot, and stalked toward his tent. Walking Wolf fumbled the long rolls of hair and mumbled in an undertone.

It was shortly after this assault on the gambler's manual dexterity that the latter quit his tent, and, followed by the Indian, walked to Sitting Bear's tent. Joe strolled along some rods behind.

Sitting Bear was seated outside his tent with two women braiding his long hair and stringing several silver brooches upon it. The brooches represented a lucky haul in old Mexico and were greatly prized as hair-ornaments. Walking up to the chief, Oakes informed him:

"This medicine man would walk down to the river and think about his medicine. The Great Spirit tells him to go. Your young men make so much noise he can not think here. I will go with him."

"He can go alone. No one will stop him. You will stay here so you will not get lost. While he is gone you can renew your medicine. It is growing weak," savagely replied the chief.

"Yet it is stronger than that of Walking Wolf's," reminded the gambler.

"You had better make it much stronger and bigger. You will not leave the village."

"It is good. I will tell my friend to explain to the Great Spirit that I must stay here. He had a dream he does not understand. He can find the truth by looking into running water, but he will not know the truth unless I stand by his side to point it out."

"*Ho-o?* (Yes?) Then his medicine is very weak!" jeered the chief.

"It is a dream about many white men coming. More white men than there are buffaloes."

SITTING BEAR was startled. He glared at the crazy Indian while the latter mumbled inaudibly to himself and cut notches.

"He cuts a notch for every white man coming?" ventured the chief as the Indian finished five, threw up five fingers and then shaved the stick clean.

"More white men than all the Indians ever saw," continued Oakes.

"Why should white men come?" hissed Sitting Bear, visibly disturbed. "The *hanpogo* (trappers) come. The horse and walking-soldiers may come. We can eat them all up."

"These dream men are *totakai*."

"Cold whites? (Northerners?) It is a lie."

"They come with many wagons and guns. They will cross your hunting-grounds. In this dream they went up the Republican through the heart of the Arapaho and Cheyenne country. They came up this road, beating down a wide path as hard as an arrowhead. They went up the Missouri, as many as there are Kiowa dead men, making the Sioux and Blackfeet very angry."

"*Ho-o?* When will they come?" eagerly demanded Sitting Bear, his eyes glittering at the suggestion of a general war which would include the mighty Sioux nation.

"Only by looking into the river can the medicine man learn that."

"Tell him to go. But he must go alone," sullenly insisted the chief.

"Then you will not know when the whites are coming until they have covered your country. His medicine talks through me."

Sitting Bear stared at the ground for a minute, then suddenly said:

"You two shall go to the river afoot. My warriors shall keep far back."

Garcia, the Mexican, just returned, caught the trapper's eye and said, "*Sí, señor*"; and Joe knew that the two ponies

had been taken up the river. Oakes exchanged a few more words with the chief, then came through the group of curious men and women, his red companion keeping close to his heels. In passing the trapper he slowed up, and Joe murmured:

"Ponies. Two miles up-stream. Git away, or git killed."

"I'm playing my luck. When we meet again we'll even things up."

"Thanks, ye mangy-hearted vermin. Git clear or I'll cut yer throat."

Oakes gave an order to the Indian, who turned toward the river, cutting notches and slicing them off as he walked. The Kiowas watched them disappear below the banks of the river and then sent horsemen to ride back and forth above and below their position. None ventured to intrude upon them, however. It was obvious that the two would be left unmolested so long as they remained near the village.

"He can't pull th' trick," muttered the trapper. "Says he banks on his luck. But he can't move a peg up-river so long as them reds stick out there. He gits on my nerves an' I'll prob'ly have to kill him when we meet up next, but I wish he could git clear. Dernation! He wasn't to go *down*-stream!"

The last because of a sudden movement of the Indians near him and the discovery of an Indian down the river making signals. This outpost was stationed on a low bluff a bit back from the river road. He was standing on his pony and swinging his hand from high above his head down to his side—the signal for "Come here."

His left hand was pointing to the east. The horsemen detailed to watch Oakes and his Indian had been the first to catch the summons, and it was their mad dash toward the signal that had attracted the attention of the village. One of them did ride up a hillock, and then signaled that Oakes and the Indian were still by the river. As the ponies raced to the east the trapper drew a deep breath of relief and told himself:

"That gives the cusses their chance. Funny how luck'll tag round at th' heels of a feller like him—a low-down murderer—an' leave poor, honest trappers to scratch hard to save their pelts!"

"One man coming. You jump pony and go," whispered Garcia.

Without turning Joe murmured:

"Won't do. Some one would make a bleat. Don't even dast go an' meet this new feller. Mebbe it's Tommy Reason. Ride out an' meet him, Garcia, an' if it's Reason tell him th' lies I've told 'bout trade goods."

By this time the greater part of the warriors were mounted and racing toward the outpost. The sentinel was descending to meet them, walking his pony and refraining from further signals, thus informing the tribe that there was no need for haste.

From the tail of his eye California Joe observed the entire absence of guards up the river, and knew that either medicine or luck had opened a way for the gambler to escape. Give the fugitives a scant thirty minutes and they should be up to the ponies and fit for a dash to the hills.

"My young men have found something," spoke up a well-known voice at the trapper's shoulder. "A white man traveling alone. He is the first of the whites the Medicine Indian said would come. I will have his head in a brass kettle and hang it up on the bank of the Flint Arrowhead River (Arkansas) to scare other white men away."

"The Indian's medicine is foolish," retorted Joe. "Where are so many whites to come from? From the *pai?* (sun?) From the *p'a?* (moon?) Can they spring up like the buffalo-grass? Is Setangya a child to believe such stories?"

The chief's credulity was shaken. Such hosts of white men as were hinted at by the Indian's dream savored of the impossible. Surely the Indians outnumbered the whites. All the whites beyond the Mississippi had long since traveled over the Big Medicine road to the Columbia. And yet why dream of innumerable bands of white men unless they were to come?

Observing the chief's bewilderment, California Joe continued—

"This white man may be my friend, who was to seek me here."

"My men say it's a white man traveling alone. If it is your friend, he comes without goods. That is very bad. What does he do that for? We wait here for goods and he comes without them."

There was great indignation in the chief's voice.

"Don't forget the goods are his and mine," hotly replied the trapper. "Even the Kiowas can't have everything for nothing."

Sitting Bear at once assumed a different character. Pressing close to the trapper's side, he locked arms with him and gently explained:

"We carry the pipe against the Pawnee. We will kill them all. But when we go we would leave my white brothers' many presents with the women and children to make their hearts glad."

"When the goods come up you shall have *some* presents, not many presents," corrected the trapper. "If you stay in your villages and collect robes you can trade for all of them; if you don't, we will trade with the Comanches. There will be no gifts for chasing the Pawnees. Besides, the Pawnees are hard to catch. And if you catch them you can't eat them or wear them. You have scalps enough."

"Our women want more stripes on their leggings. Ho-ho! See the answer to my war medicine! See the Pawnee run from the Kiowa! See the Kiowa catch the Pawnee and kill him!"

And, quivering with excitement, the chief pointed to a rabbit frantically endeavoring to escape from a wolf. Fear drove the rabbit close to the village; love of the chase blinded the wolf to all else but his victim. Repeatedly the wolf all but had its game; and as often Sitting Bear grunted in huge content. Each time the chase seemed to be ended the rabbit would make a peculiar side-jump and change its course and avoid the clicking teeth by the fraction of an inch.

"I dreamed of a wolf eating a rabbit. Our *taime* is very strong!" hoarsely exclaimed the chief, his eyes snapping as he waited for the wolf to count coup.

"The Pawnee is working back to his hole," chuckled the trapper, now as interested as a boy in watching the pursuit.

SITTING BEAR caught his arm and, pointing out on the plain, exulted:

"The Kiowa are very cunning. Their first people came from the Hollow Cottonwood Tree. They are very wise. Ho! See how they close the trail to the foolish Pawnee!"

He pointed to a second wolf waiting near the hole.

But the fugitive, while hard pressed to change its defensive plans on such short notice, made a super-rabbit effort, avoided the rush of the second wolf and ducked into another hole.

"Medicine rabbit," gravely commented the trapper as the wolves sneaked away.

With a hiss of rage Sitting Bear snatched up a bow and quiver and sent several shafts after the wolves.

Now some of the warriors were returning, riding furiously, the compact earth ringing under their ponies' hoofs. A second group approaching more leisurely contained a figure in buckskin, and the trapper soliloquized:

"Wal, that'll be Tommy Reason, or I'm a Pi-Ute."

With beaming face he turned to the sullen chief and rejoiced—

"It is my white brother, who went to buy goods."

"He brings no goods," was the laconic reminder.

"They'll come soon."

Then in English he bawled:

"Hi, Tom! Hello, ol' hoss!"

Reason was the direct opposite of his friend. When his jaded nag brought him up to the group outside the village he nodded a greeting to his partner and dismounted. The width of his square, muscular figure was accentuated by his scant five-feet-six in height.

With an exuberance of delight California Joe seized his friend's shoulders and rocked him back and forth. Reason's black eyes glittered a response, but through his bearded lips came one word, "——!"

"Meanin', it's to pay?"

Reason nodded, then crossed to Sitting Bear, shot out his huge hand and growled, "*Hau!*"

Sitting Bear accepted the hand but omitted the ceremony of linking arms. He sternly demanded—

"Where are the goods your brother said you would bring to the Kiowas?"

"Told him I was waitin' for ye to come up with trade goods an' presents for him," the trapper rapidly informed Tom. "We're hooked here for a spell."

"Goods coming," growled Reason, falling back and turning a questioning glance at Joe.

"That dirty Mexican Garcia was to 'splain th' game to ye," the trapper added.

Then in the Kiowa tongue, for Sitting Bear was growing suspicious—

"The goods will come along in a few sleeps."

"Why did your brother come ahead of the goods?" demanded Sitting Bear.

"He pushed on ahead to find me before I returned to the mountains. I was not to wait for him beyond today. After a few sleeps the red and blue blankets will make Setangya's heart glad."

"We want powder and guns," the chief said coldly.

"We will trade guns for robes. We have none to give away," coolly answered the trapper.

Sitting Bear shouted to the women to begin collecting the spare robes and stack them outside the medicine tent. Another order sent the young men out on the plain to surround the village. The trappers knew the chief was advertising his determination to hold them prisoners until the goods arrived. Joe spoke aside to his friend, giving more details of his visit to the village.

Reason briefly explained how he came to be there by saying:

"Ridin' for th' Apishpa. Jumped!"

For the benefit of the chief he said in Kiowa—

"I must make a feast for my new medicine."

"The village is filled with new medicine," grunted the chief.

Reason unrolled some buckskin and held up the cast skin of a seven-foot rattlesnake, even the eye-holes as well as every scale being intact. California Joe, quick to take advantage of any opportunity, spoke up and declared:

"This is very strong medicine. It makes my blood warm. I feel very strong after looking at it. It begins to tell me things. It says it has scared the wild Indian's medicine away."

"What'n—" began Reason under his breath; but Sitting Bear broke in, taunting:

"A white man's lie! The snakeskin is no good medicine. The Kiowas laugh at the snake. The wild Indian has sun magic. It will eat up your poor medicine."

The trapper knew that, unlike the majority of plains and mountain tribes, the Kiowas did not hold the snake in any particular reverence. He wished that Reason had brought something else. However, he had one great advantage in championing the cause of the serpent; he knew the Pit River Indian was in full flight.

"Go and bring in your wild Indian and his sun magic," he challenged. "I will let the snake make him eat grass like a pony."

"Good! You have said it. If your medicine turns weak *you* shall eat grass like a pony," cried the chief.

He wheeled and called on his warriors to go and bring the Indian wizard and the white-hair. Before his messengers could get clear of the village a warrior rode whooping from the direction of the river, gesticulating wildly.

California Joe lighted his pipe and waited. Sitting Bear stood motionless, his eyes fastened on the rider, who now had communicated something to the other horsemen that sent them riding over the plain in wide circles and galloping far up the river.

The lone rider dashed into the village and dramatically announced the disappearance of the gambler and his Indian. Still the chief said nothing, but his gaze frequently stole to the long snakeskin and his face became troubled.

Another scout came up and reported that the missing men had passed up the river road afoot and had run much of the way. A longer wait, as some word was being relayed across the plain, rider shouting to rider, until the one nearest the village raced up to the chief and informed him—

"White-hair and his Medicine Indian have gone to the mountains on ponies."

Sitting Bear turned to Reason and admitted:

"The snake medicine is strong. The wild Indian's medicine is a squaw. The Indian can not be hurt as the sun has touched his head. But the white-hair's scalp shall hang in my tent. Go make feast for your snake."

The friends withdrew to the tent assigned to California Joe and were soon provided with a kettle of boiled meat. Joe smoked zestfully while Reason feasted and frequently offered portions to the snakeskin. When he had finished and had wiped his fingers on a handful of grass Reason stared thoughtfully at the kettle and queried—

"Dawg?"

"I opine. Now what's gnawin' at yer mind?"

"Many Lances."

"Sent to talk with Injun Agent Miller an' fix it to swap a peace-talk atween him an' th' tribe for presents. I know all 'bout it. We don't give no presents to Shawnee or Delawares because they never fight us.

"Don't blame 'em for gittin' th' notion it pays to carry th' pipe ag'in' th' whites an' to sculp women an' children. Never made Injuns good by givin' 'em presents. No treaty can last that's built up on blankets, rum, guns, an' gewgaws.

"Wal, I opine th' government's crazy to dicker with th' Kiowas. Made a big feast for Many Lances an' got him drunk, huh?"

"Many Lances dead. Killed by Pawnee government scout."

"Jewhilliker cats! There ye set, ca'mly eatin' dawg, knowin' that th' first minute th' Kiowas hear 'bout Many Lances bein' rubbed out means that our ha'r will be hung up 'side o' them other sculps on th' medicine-pole!"

"They'll hear some time termorrer, prob'ly. Nearly killed my hoss keepin' ahead o' th' news. Knew I couldn't git through once word was brought."

"Wal, dod-dern! Totin' any more trouble in yer pack?"

"Little million comin' to git Colorado gold."

"News has swept th' Missoury then," sighed California Joe. "We'll soon be overrun by greenhorns tryin' to hire us to dig ditches. An' won't there be a heap to pay when th' Injuns see 'em comin'!"

"Snake medicine very strong. Fog tonight. We'll push."

"Honestest word ye ever spoke, ye gossipin' ol' hound. Wal, light up 'n smoke. Wish we had somethin' to drink 'sides river water."

CHAPTER IV

ON THE LARAMIE TRAIL

TWO hours after midnight the trappers awoke and made ready for their flight. California Joe whispered:

"Kiowas don't take to snake medicine very keen. If ye'd fetched a sun or a buf'ler or a peyote-plant medicine we might cut th' ace."

"Steal their medicine-box. Then they'd crawl," growled Reason.

"They ain't got it here. If they had ye'd see ol' Ansote, th' medicine-keeper. If they raised crops I'd have scared up a good rain medicine, but bein' hunters, they don't give a cuss for rain. One thing's sartain; we'll be chewed mighty fine to please th' sun once they hear how Many Lances pegged out, or if they git to believin' there ain't no trade goods comin'. Where'd I lay that knife?"

"I hung th' snakeskin on it. Stuck in th' pole. That skin's best one I ever see. Kiowas be ——. I know a good medicine as well as they do."

"Takes religion to make a man hoot an' stick up for his luck," murmured Joe admiringly. "Ye ain't made such a long talk in th' last six years. But ye used to say th' same 'bout that spider medicine, th' one ye swapped for a bunch o' red feathers. Busted yer leg two hours after makin' th' dicker."

Internal rumblings that might be diagnosed as suppressed oaths over recollections of the spider talisman caused California Joe's seventy-five inches of brawn and muscle to shake with silent laughter. Composing himself, he gravely suggested—

"Promise yer medicine a feast; we'll need all th' luck we can git."

The village was quiet. A preliminary reconnaissance satisfied the two wanderers that they would have a simple task in avoiding any guards, for the fog had submerged the plain in a wet fleece and the sense of sight was useless.

Reason rolled up his blankets with the snakeskin inside and announced that he was ready. Joe whispered to him to lead the way. Finding the flap, Reason gently pulled it aside and commenced crawling out into the fog. His head and shoulders had advanced through the opening when something furiously fanned his face. Ducking back and colliding with Joe, he gasped—

"What'n ——'s that?"

California Joe disentangled his long figure and gave a sibilant signal for silence. All was quiet outside. After half a minute of tense waiting Joe took a turn at reconnoitering the opening. He met with the same experience. Chuckling softly, he explained to his mystified partner:

"Forgot all 'bout him. I reckon that must be Bill. Cinnamon bear they keep tied up for th' younkers to torment. Come nigh sp'ilin' yer dawg-gone dandy face.

"Seein' as how Bill seems to be holdin' good keerds, mebbe we'd best rip a hole through th' back o' th' tent. Got yer saddle? All right. We're off."

A long three-cornered cut, and the two slipped out into the dense mist. It was impossible even to make out the nearest

tents. Joe halted and reviewed his mental picture of the camp, then confidently led the way toward the pony herd. Both knew that the fog would fill the valley between the hills until mid-forenoon, greatly restricting the vision of both fugitives and pursuers.

A dog slunk out at one side and growled menacingly, but gave no other alarm when he recognized the trapper as an inhabitant of the village.

Pausing a moment to locate the horse-guards, they stole toward the herd. The ponies had been brought in from the plain at sundown and hobbled. As the white men advanced these gave ground. The task of locating their own animals consisted simply of taking the two that did not attempt to retreat.

To remove the elk-hide hobbles and throw on the saddles and strap the blankets was the work of but a few moments. Reason was the first to mount. As he did so he remarked with regret:

"Too bad to leave them nags. Worth good money if we fell in with any gold-hunters."

"None o' that, Tommy," Joe hoarsely warned him. "They'll be het up 'nough when they hear 'bout Many Lances without us stealin' their ponies. No need to pile on any extry mis'ry. Besides, I've give it some considerable thought an' I know we couldn't git th' herd started without havin' th' whole camp after us. In this fog a man afoot can keep up with a hoss. Dawg-gone it! Wish yer snake medicine would keep on th' job!"

"What's wrong with that snake?" was the truculent query.

"Nothin' much. Only I've got to go back."

"Ho! Chief's ha'r, eh? No ye don't. I'll go. I'll give it to my snake luck as a feast."

"Ha'r? ——! It's my pipe; an' by th' Prairie Wolf-God o' th' Klikatats, I'll git it! It's in th' tent. Had it once, then laid it down when ye come tumblin' back from meetin' th' b'ar. Dern a medicine that'll let a white man forgit the only pipe he's got!"

"Don't go for to speak wrong 'bout—" expostulated Reason.

"I'll be back in two shakes. If anything busts loose ye hustle ahead up th' trail an' lay for me at Timpas Crick. Take my hoss along. I'll swear ye played me dirt, stealin' my critter. If I ain't along in two hours jest keep pushin' for Wet Mountains Valley. Anything o' mine ye happen to find is yers, of course."

"Shet up! I'll be here," replied Reason.

That his friend, an inveterate smoker, should risk capture and death for the sake of recovering his pipe was nothing surprizing. Reason himself had traveled two hundred miles through hostile territory to procure tobacco. The pleasures of mountain and plains men were few and simple; and to be denied tobacco was a tragedy.

But Reason did resent the aspersions cast on his snake medicine. Old Oakes, who was much more sophisticated, firmly believed in good and bad luck. Men worldly wise in big cities carry old coins for pocket or luck pieces.

Reason was on par with his fellow men, whether they dwelt in the mountains or in brick and mortar. Oakes believed the demented Indian was bringing him good luck. Reason was as strongly convinced that the skin was a lucky omen and would bring him good fortune; hence it was a powerful medicine. If he and California Joe were recaptured he would attribute their dilemma to two causes—his friend's abuse of the snake medicine, the more powerful medicine, or luck of the Kiowas.

These mental processes rendered him a fatalist; and, ready to fight or fly, he calmly awaited results. The village continued quiet, and Reason was deciding that the pipe was to be recovered without any untoward happenings, because of the generous snake medicine affording them protection, when there crashed out on the still night the sound of falling timbers and of stiff hides being torn and tossed, and each alarm summoned the Kiowas to be up and looking after their affairs.

LOOSENING his revolver and holding his rifle ready, Reason placed a hand on Joe's horse to quiet it, and mused—

"Must be Bill ag'in!"

The tents spewed forth confusion. Men, women and children crawled into the night and shouted excitedly. The clamor of many dogs was added. Above the din rang Sitting Bear's command for order.

Then like a trumpet came California Joe's voice shouting in Kiowa—

"The bear is killing us!"

To be followed in English by:

"Keep back, Tom! I'm all right!"

"*Americanos diablos!*" shrieked Garcia, cringing in his tent while his Kiowa spouse made for the scene of chaos with a knife in each hand.

A new and puzzling note was now added—a woful howling on the eastern edge of the village, a lugubrious chanting which Reason recognized as a Kiowa death-song. Joe's cry for succor had been a subterfuge to satisfy Sitting Bear his prisoners were simply victims of the night's alarms. But this new arrival, who came from the East, who started a death-song after attracting general attention by his screeching, forced the situation on to a fresh climax.

Reason believed that his fate was so delicately balanced that the next fifteen seconds would either send him riding to his death as he sought his friend, or see him and his friend racing against death toward the mountains. He tightened rein and was about to ride into the village, taking Joe's horse with him for the owner to mount, when a familiar voice murmured:

"Walk yer hoss easy. Atween th' new Injun howlin' an' their thinkin' we're under th' tent bein' chawed by th' b'ar we won't be missed for a few minutes."

"Wait!" mumbled Reason.

The noise behind them ceased. Dull glows marked the fresh fires being started by the women. The newcomer had delivered his message to Sitting Bear, for now the strident voice of the chief passionately rang out:

"Many Lances has been killed by white soldiers. They hid his body in the old fort of sods. They were afraid to have the Kiowas know it. The scalps of the two white traders shall be the first of many to please the ghost of Many Lances. Dig them out from the tent!"

"So they blame it on to th' soldiers," said Joe as they increased their pace.

"Killed by Pawnee. Soldiers hid th' body in Soddy (soldiers' nickname for the abandoned Fort Atkinson). Fool trick to hide th' body."

"Of all th' talkative cusses! Why didn't ye tell that afore? Now if yer snake is any good he'd better begin to operate."

"Good 'nough to fetch ye back with yer ha'r on. Git yer pipe?"

"I'm here; what d'ye 'low? An' a baked ant'lope head. On way to git th' pipe I remembered seein' a squaw put th' head 'mong th' hot rocks o' th' fire. So I stopped an' got it.

"Reckon it was th' smell o' that that stirred Bill up. Derned if I didn't forgit all 'bout him! Walked right by him an' was bendin' over to enter th' tent when—sufferin' beavers! I reckon Bill evened up all th' wrongs ever put upon him.

"He fetched me a slam that sent me 'cross th' tent. I climbed to my feet an' got my pipe jest as Bill busted loose an' dropped in to have his visit out. We dodged round th' center pole an' I opine he must 'a' hit it. Down come th' whole business.

"I cut a hole an' got clear. Bill was still under th' hides, woofin'. Sittin' Bear yells out an' ye heard me answer. Started to find ye —— whistle an' plumped into a buck comin' out 'nother tent. I growled at him an' he give ground like a drunken trapper'll throw away money.

"Th' squaws begin freshenin' up th' fires. All th' time Bill was swearin' in a dozen different b'ar languages. Then comes th' man from th' East——"

"Hark!"

A prolonged howl, reminiscent of a dog's mournful salute to the full moon, cut the thick air like a knife, followed by a succession of staccato notes.

"Tellin' Many Lances' ghost they'll soon send us to keep him company," whispered the trapper. "Move soft."

"Hark!"

This time it was the yell of discovery, the infuriated voice of the pack when it finds that its prey has stolen away. The ruined tent had been removed, and the trappers' escape was revealed. The chorus of howls swept toward the pony herd.

"My medicine told me to take them ponies," grumbled Reason.

THROUGH the night and early morning hours they had followed the river road, and now, with the sun trying to burn a hole through the fog, they knew they had covered some fifteen miles and should be at the mouth of the Apishpa. Reason was the first to make out an oblong and two rounded hills. These shapes were barely discernible through the mist. Beyond these flowed the Apishpa, entering from the south.

California Joe gave the landmarks a glance and then attempted to penetrate the wall smothering their back trail.

"They'll be follerin' us mighty pert," he remarked as he fished out his pipe and filled it.

This obvious conclusion did not call for any speech from the taciturn Reason. They pressed on until they were opposite the mouth of the creek, when they dismounted to examine some charred cottonwood sticks.

"No Injun fire," said Reason.

"Old Oakes and his medicine man. Oakes built th' fire. His Injun was too busy whittlin'. Here's some o' his shavin's. Make some coffee to go with th' ant'lope head while I look th' country over from th' bluffs."

Catching his unwilling mount, Joe rode north of the road. He gained the top of a bluff and studied the country as fast as the yellow blob of a sun ate up the mist.

One of the first shafts of light dimly revealed the Spanish Peaks and the Greenhorn Mountains. Then summits began to emerge from the northwest horizon; but down the valley of the Arkansas the fog remained a fleecy sea.

Of this the trapper both approved and disapproved. It concealed them from the Kiowas and compelled the Indians to follow by signs; but on the other hand it would permit the Indians to steal upon them without being seen.

"Our best medicine is our ears," decided Joe. "An' I can't smoke all th' time. I'm goin' to have my coffee an' a bite of ant'lope if I have to eat atween shots."

With this philosophical decision he dismissed all thoughts of Indians and galloped back to the tiny fire where Reason was boiling coffee.

Joe helped himself to the baked head and drank his coffee scalding hot. Then he resumed smoking, remonstrating as he did so:

"Wish ye'd stop that silly chatter, Tommy, an' hold yerself down to talkin' sense. How near d'ye 'low they might be? How far ahead is Old Oakes?"

Reason shrugged his massive shoulders and jerked his head toward the long snakeskin festooned over his saddle. Joe nodded as if agreeing, and mused:

"Ye don't know an' ye don't care s'long as ye have yer medicine at work. Why'n sin couldn't ye 'a' said so in th' first place without wastin' all them words? Do we make a run for Pueblo, or quit th' trail an' try to lose 'em?"

Reason divided the rest of the coffee in two tin dippers and pointed northwest, then pointed to fresh signs beside the road that led to Pueblo. Joe clapped his hands and applauded:

"Good for ye! If we can sneak one side an' they strike Old Oakes' trail they'll tag after him while we cut across to th' traders' Pueblo-Laramie trail. Or we can cross th' river an' strike south into th' Taos trail."

"Jicarella 'Paches an' Comanches down there."

"An' only Cheyennes an' 'Rapahoes north 'long th' Laramie trail. An' they'll be friendly if they haven't heard 'bout th' new gold strike."

"Prob'ly off after buf'ler with th' Kiowas on th' Smoky Hill or Republican."

Saying this, Reason mounted his horse. Joe kneeled and placed his ear to the ground. Through the hard earth traveled a faint *thumpety-thump*. The trapper's haste in leaping to the saddle warned his friend that the heart of the fog held a menace.

They swung from the trail and ascended the bluffs. As they reached the top they found that the sun was rapidly finishing the labor of sucking the mist from the river. Their field of vision was greatly lengthened, but even so there was no sight of the Kiowas.

Ahead of them was another elevation of gentle slope, and they leisurely surmounted it. Now the backward gaze found something that glittered and twinkled far down the trail—perhaps the silver work on the long shaft of a war lance. Finally Joe exclaimed—

"I can make out shapes!"

Reason kicked his horse with both heels. From the trail rose a faint cry—the hunting-call of the Kiowas when man is the quarry. They had descried the white man outlined on the bluff.

For a score of miles the Kiowas clung to the chase, occasionally sighting the trappers but for most of the time hidden from view by folds of the rolling hills. One by one the ponies began to fail until not more than ten warriors remained in active pursuit. For nearly fifty miles more these braves

doggedly persisted and would not give up even after the trappers had swung into the Fort Laramie trail in a line due east from Pike's Peak. This was the Arapaho country, and north was the range of the Cheyennes.

"Not like Injuns to stick so long," remarked Reason.

California Joe agreed, saying:

"Ye talk a lot o' foolishness, but once in a while ye spit out cold facts. Must have a strong medicine to keep 'em goin' like this. Our nags won't last th' day out 'less they can rest."

They were crossing a low sand-hill close to the Fontaine Qui Bouille Creek, later called Boiling Spring River. The horses came to a halt, their heads hanging low. Joe dismounted and permitted his animal to crop the scanty grass.

Reason stood up in his saddle for a moment and stuck up two fingers. In half a minute he stuck up three fingers, then three more, leaving only two of the pursuers to be accounted for.

"Eight of 'em. Then two's gone by th' board," Joe complacently remarked.

With a low cry of amazement Reason held up four fingers. "Two caught up!" he cried.

"If two could catch up then all of 'em could," growled Joe, climbing into his saddle. "But where do they come from? How th' —— can they do it? For two days 'n' a half ten Injuns been trailin' us. No more to be seen any time. Now all of a sudden ye tell me there's twelve of 'em. Can't be. Must be 'Rapahoes; an' if they're after us I reckon th' game's 'bout up. Lemme have a peek."

HE STOOD erect and shaded his eyes. The two dots became two horsemen. Behind them at some distance and strung out at irregular intervals were ten horsemen.

"Caught up nothin'! First two is bein' chased! Only ten on our track, an' none o' them is 'Rapahoes! Those two come down from th' mountains an' cut across our trail an' th' Injuns took after 'em. Why didn't th' fools stick to th' mountains?"

The trapper studied the terrain ahead, then measured the sun, and added:

"They 'low to overhaul us before dark or bust hoss-flesh. Might as well wait for them other two to come up an' help us make a fight for it."

"*Haul*" loudly approved Reason, pointing to a hillock close to the stream and urging his tired horse forward.

Joe paused to wave encouragement to the two fugitives and then followed his partner. His last glance at the two men racing for their lives assured him that their animals were fresh and in much better condition than were those of the Kiowas. Doubtless they had been camping in the hills and had struck into the trail just in time to blunder across the path of the Kiowas, and soon found themselves cut off from retreating back to cover.

The trappers reached the hillock which, found, bordered on the stream, assuring them water, while coarse grass along the trail afforded grazing for their horses.

"We can be as happy here as grizzly b'ars eatin' manzanita berries," optimistically declared Joe.

The Kiowas, believing that their original prey was planning to break across the stream and take refuge in the maze of foothills, plied their quirts and forced their wearied ponies to greater efforts. Masking their heads with clumps of grass, the trappers lay on the crest of the hill and watched the race now spinning nearer. As they looked one of the men in the lead turned and fired, the thin report inciting the pursuers to greater endeavor.

"Shot a pistol!" disgustedly exclaimed Reason. "'Bout as much use as a Mexican sycamore!"

"Ain't got rifles. Why, say, Tommy, one of them chaps is a Injun. Wal, if that don't beat ol' cats! It's th' Pit River Injun, Tommy, an' Old Oakes, th' chap I promised to wipe out, an' who kindly promised to wipe me out."

"What they snoopin' along our trail for?" querulously demanded Reason. "Ye say that Injun is a medicine man?"

And he glanced uneasily down the hill to the snakeskin draped over his saddle.

"He's foolish in th' head. Clipped by a bullet when Old Oakes an' his gang killed th' poor devil's fambly for a few ounces o' dust. I'll drop a hunk o' lead front o' their ponies as a hint for 'em to hunt cover somewhere else."

"How can ye settle yer trouble with that white-haired cuss if ye let them Kiowas wipe him out? Both of ye have white skins. Th' Injun ain't done ye no harm, has he?"

"Lawd! Ye keep on with such sweet thoughts an' ye'll be fallin' in love next. Wal, we'll let 'em come on; but I never shall admire that feller till I've put his light out. Better promise a feast to that medicine of yers, though. Th' Injun's may be heap big. Not that I'm any great shakes for snake medicine. To my mind a good buf'ler medicine has 'em all beat."

"I'll make a feast," mumbled Reason for the benefit of his rattlesnake skin.

Then to his friend—

"Them fellers come brushin' along like they had all their three *taime* gods with 'em. Let's shoot."

He pushed the brown barrel of his rifle through the grass and waited for the leading Kiowa to draw a bit nearer. The other nine Indians began spreading out as if to encircle the hill, and then dismounted and began stalking the crest on foot. But the leader rode straight on after Old Oakes and his demented companion.

Oakes' face was now distinct, sallow and expressionless, his white hair snapping in the breeze, his right arm half-raised, revolver in hand. The Indian rode with head bowed, his bow slung on his back along with the wildcat quiver of poisonous arrows, a stick and knife clutched in one hand. He sensed no danger, nor was he in any danger unless hit accidentally. Oakes may have remembered this, for he rode in front of the red man and frequently glanced back and as often shifted his position as the lone mounted pursuer swung to one side to get him in range.

Gambler and Indian struck the foot of the hill and dismounted and began its ascent on foot, leading their animals. The leader of the Kiowas decided he could make better progress on foot and likewise leaped to the earth, his pony following a few rods behind him. Now he began chanting, and by this the trappers recognized him as one of the *Kaitsenko*.

"He ain't Sittin' Bear, but he's borrered th' medicine arrer," muttered California Joe, his finger itching to pull trigger and restrained only by Reason's expressed desire to have the first shot. "See, he's got th' arrer hitched to his sash. Now he sticks it into th' ground, meanin' he'll stick there when his friends round us up an' drive us down th' hill on to him. Wal, he's a brave cuss, or else mighty sure of his medicine. Why don't ye shoot?"

The last as the warrior anchored by the sacred arrow threw up his gun and sent a heavy ball into the sand within a few feet of the trappers' faces.

"He sees us. Shoot!"

"He's sassy," murmured Reason, sighting the rifle and pulling the trigger.

California Joe gasped in astonishment; then in deep disgust yelled:

"Missed him all over! Go throw sand at that derned snakeskin!"

Reason rubbed his eyes and stared in great bewilderment. He was a dead shot and jealous only of his companion. The range was an easy one for him. He realized the tendency to overshoot when firing down from an elevation, and had guarded against it. He considered the Kiowa a dead man the instant he pulled the trigger; and there the Indian stood, making insulting gestures.

"——! He must have a reg'lar Hawkins medicine!" mumbled Reason.

Then as one who is inspired:

"It's th' Pit River Injun's medicine helpin' him! Red medicine will help red ag'in' white medicine every time. Shoot th' Pit River Injun!"

"Blame yer snake an' not that poor devil. Let's see if his hoss is proof ag'in' this medicine," wrathfully cried California Joe, throwing forward his heavy rifle and firing.

The wizard's pony fell as if struck by lightning.

"*He* ain't got no medicine," exulted Joe.

"Watch this," begged Reason, taking careful aim at the man's chest and firing.

The bearer of the sacred arrow tossed up his hands and Reason gave a loud guffaw of triumph. But the man did not fall; he simply continued tossing his arms and breaking into a new song.

"Joe, I couldn't 'a' missed," whispered Reason. "I jest couldn't 'a' missed; an' ye know it."

The Kiowa turned and beheld his pony down, and with a yell of rage pulled up the medicine arrow and began climbing the hill. Joe fired and was positive the bullet struck over the heart, yet the fellow came, on.

"No, Tommy, ye didn't miss; an' I didn't," groaned the trapper.

Oakes, who had turned to one side to give his unknown allies clear range, now discharged his revolver without effect. By this time the nine Kiowas were getting

into action, and several twenty-eight-inch arrows, tipped with steel, hurtled about the trappers.

"Too strong meat for me!" bellowed Joe slipping back and running down the slope to his horse. "Tread th' trail, Tommy, across th' crick an' into th' hills. We can lick any Injun that ain't bullet-proof, an' that man is."

As the two caught their animals and splashed into the stream Oakes and his Indian galloped alongside.

"Play it out together for a while?" he called to Joe.

The trapper nodded, his morale disturbed by the futility of his shooting.

THE Kiowas were forced to retreat and secure their ponies before they could resume the pursuit, and by the time they topped the hill the three white men and their red companion were disappearing into a narrow defile on the opposite side of the creek and were soon lost to view.

Joe led the way, never hesitating in taking the turns. Reason rode behind him. He was the first to speak, his words showing he was conducting some argument with himself.

"Medicine didn't cover his pony," he angrily insisted.

"Wore an iron shirt," bruskly called out Oakes from the rear.

Joe started as if stung. He recalled Sitting Bear's question—could he "turn aside a rifle-bullet?" followed by the avowal that the Kiowas could.

"There was a Iron Shirt by name among th' Cheyenne, an' another with th' 'Pache," spoke up Reason morosely.

"And there was Iron Shirt, the Comanche. Killed in the Antelope Hills on the Canadian last Spring," replied Oakes.

"Ugh! I knew him. Called that for wearin' some ol' Spanish harness under his buckskin war-shirt. Didn't know he was wiped out. How'd ye know?" asked Joe.

"Have friends in the tribe. Stopped with them a bit."

"Thought ye'd come straight through with yer white friends till th' Kiowas got ye to git 'em to give up their arms so's they could murder 'em?"

"Thought we was running from Indians and not swapping secrets," fiercely replied Oakes.

"All right. But some time we'll have room to have a real talk an' ask quite a few questions," was the calm reply. "An' I'd feel better if ye rode next to me an' my friend rode behind ye."

Reason promptly dropped back and allowed Oakes and the Indian to ride ahead of him. Oakes showed his teeth in a peculiar smile, but did not seem to resent the trapper's lack of trust. Joe then reverted to the coat of mail with the remark:

"So th' arrer man had ol' Iron Shirt's iron shirt on. Let's go back an' shoot him through th' head to prove it."

"Don't have to prove it. I saw the shirt in the Kiowa village. Old Walking Wolf must have been wearing it. You two can go back if you want to."

"I ain't carryin' no pipe ag'in' th' Kiowas jest now," protested Reason. "Th' 'Rapahoes oughter be friendly, an' I'm goin' for to see 'em"

For several minutes California Joe remained silent, revolving some question in his mind. At last he said:

"Lots o' folks comin' to git Colorado yaller dust. When I quit th' mountains prospectors from Georgy an' Kansas, an' a few immigrants was layin' out two shebangs opposite one to'other on Cherry Crick. Auraria an' Denver they called 'em. Reckon th' last will be th' winner, bein' as it's named after General Denver, gov'nor o' Kansas.

"Some Cherokee Injuns are helpin' th' Georgy fellers look for gold. Cherokees are mighty bright for Injuns. But it ain't no country for a white man once them Bosting folks herd in.

"What's th' good o' gold even if ye find it? Awful job to git it East where it would be safe; an' who wants to live East? An' ye can't spend it for anything in th' mountains."

"I'm bound for the mountains, for Denver and Auraria—and for the gold," spoke up Oakes.

"Ye're welcome. Th' trail's broke out," encouraged Joe. "Only thing to tempt me to go there would be to look ye up an' settle a score yer Injun ain't ever whittled into his stick." Then to Reason:

"What say to beatin' north to th' Oregon Trail an' gittin' back on th' Columbia, Tommy? Ye never see that country right. I was a fool for quittin' it. Had a good job sellin' wood to a Army post.

"Young feller up there named Sheridan—second lootenant, or something. If th' reds git to cuttin' up rough out here on th' plains he's th' chap to send after 'em. *He'd* give them Kiowas their needin's; an' I don't mean blankets an' rifles, neither. I was a plumb fool to quit that country. Still a man can't stick round in one spot till he takes root."

"Reckon you two will be glad to be shut of me and the Indian," spoke up Oakes.

"When ye quit us we can't cry; they ain't no hankers in this outfit," Reason gruffly informed the gambler.

"Oakes, ye sold four white men to Death to save yer own rotten hide," Joe added. "I'll always hold it ag'in' ye. If we ever meet after this scrape one of us is goin' to take th' long sleep. Ye know that, so don't keep sayin' things that makes me repeat it.

"We started to pull ye out of a hole; th' game goes as it lays. But if ye can find yer way from now on, go; an' may th' devil keep ye comp'ny."

"Good——, man! You wouldn't turn us out until we've put more distance between us and those red devils?" cried Oakes.

"Tomorrer mornin', then," ruled Joe.

Reason spoke up to remark—

"Yer Injun don't seem to be doin' as much whittlin' as he used to."

The Pit River man was riding with his back bent far forward, his knife and tally-stick clasped in one hand.

Oakes favored his red companion with a murderous look.

"He brought me luck. I think he will again when the game gets to booming in the mountains. I'll take him along and try anyway. If my luck quits me then he and me will part company."

"Quite a long way to take a feller from his home an' folks an' then dump him to shift for hisself," mused Joe.

"He's crazy. Don't make any difference to him where he is."

" 'Course not. An' I was forgittin' ye 'n' yer friends killed his fambly; so he ain't got no home or folks to go back to," concluded Joe.

"If ye don't keep yer hand 'way from that gun I'll blow yer head off," called out Reason.

Oakes' hands flew high in front of him. California Joe chuckled loudly.

THE four men halted beside a pool; and while the horses drank and grazed the thin grass Joe climbed a spur of ridge and watched for their pursuers. Failing to discover any hostile signs, he returned to the pool and announced that the Kiowas had withdrawn, and that there was no reason why they should not part company, Oakes and his red protégé going their way deeper into the mountains.

The gambler pleaded fatigue and insisted that their original terms be adhered to—a truce until the morrow. The trappers reluctantly consented.

While Reason and the gambler collected fuel for the night's camp the Indian resumed his task of cutting notches and counting them on his fingers.

Joe turned hunter and went for meat. A half a mile from the ravine he shot an elk and packed in the choice cuts. After they had eaten, the trappers took to their pipes while the gambler produced his cards and became absorbed. The firelight fell across his blanket, and there he sat, shuffling and dealing, cutting and shifting the cut, time after time. He dealt cards to imaginary opponents and evidenced an interest in reading the hands that he never showed when gaming for real stakes.

At the beginning he often stole glances at the Indian, scowling malevolently as his opponent drew the stronger hand. Then his luck changed and with feverish eagerness he gathered up and redistributed the cards, breathing heavily as he repeatedly drew the winning hand. After a final test he loudly exclaimed:

"——me! The luck's still with me. Twelve times out of thirteen, and thirteen is an unlucky number! If I could have had those hands with real action! Thought the red was losing his grip on luck, but it sticks. I'll clean up better than the poor fools who dig and wash out the yellow stuff. They'll be working for me. I'm going to turn in."

"Bleed to death if ye want to," encouraged California Joe.

Neither Oakes nor the Indian had blankets, their flight being too hurried for any preparations. Joe scowled at them blackly for nearly a minute, then rose and curtly said:

"Here's a coverin'. I've got two."

Reason opened his roll and tossed a

blanket to the Indian. With never a word of thanks Oakes accepted the loan and rolled himself up until only his white thatch showed.

Joe was the first to awake in the morning. With a howl of rage he aroused his friend and cried out:

"That skunk's dusted out with all th' elk meat an' them two blankets. He'd 'a' took our guns an' hosses if he'd dared to try for 'em. Tom Reason, if ever ye go out yer way to do a good turn for a rattlesnake don't come bleatin' to me afterwards an' a-sayin' as how th' varmint bit ye."

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT FOR THE WAGONS

FOR threescore miles the two friends traveled north, occasionally retiring to the intricacies of the foot-hills, especially at night, and at other times boldly following the traders' trail. As usual, California Joe beguiled the time with stories, his friend listening but giving no sign of hearing.

Sometimes, just to test his companion, Joe would break off at the crucial point of some hair-raising yarn to speak of trivial things. Then would Reason's head fly up while he made explosive sounds deep in his throat; and with a broad grin Joe would complete his tale.

On the third night they pitched their camp on the ridge paralleling the west bank of Kiowa Creek, where the fuel and water were abundant and the grazing excellent. To the east were Bijou and Beaver Creeks, like the Kiowa flowing north into the Platte. The high divides between these waterways boasted of growths of pine, while the bottoms gave every indication of some day making good farms. From the ridge near the Kiowa one hundred and fifty miles of the Rocky Mountains could be seen, extending from the Sangre de Cristo to the Medicine Bow Range in the north.

As usual, Joe assumed the duties of hunter and secured an antelope. They were early astir next morning, eager to make Bridger's Pass and follow the immigrant trail down to Salt Lake by the way of Fort Bridger. While intending to adhere to his original plan of returning to the territory of Oregon, Joe had succumbed to Reason's desire to visit the great lake. As neither was hurried for time this lengthening of the trip was no hardship. As Joe truthfully remarked:

"More'n likely we may hanker to shift our plans by th' time we reach th' Mormon country an' go somewhere else entirely."

One thing they were both agreed upon: they would have nothing to do with the Colorado Mountains as long as the gold fever turned its valleys and parks into mining-camps.

The day's march followed the ridge; and at high noon they halted and looked down on the traders' trail. In the southwest rose a column of smoke which they attributed to Indians.

As they started to descend from the ridge they discovered a wagon working down a low hill in the north. As the wagon descended another took its place on the skyline, and this was repeated until four wagons were in line.

"Traders!" grunted Reason.

"Traders bound for th' new diggin's," supplemented Joe. "Say it without wastin' words, Tommy."

"Bet ye they was bound for th' Oregon or Mormon country an' heard 'bout th' gold strike when they made Fort Laramie, then turned south to git in afore th' rush comes."

"Sculp me, Tommy, if ye ain't thought it all out. That fool head o' yers got some idees in it after all! If they git their goods there afore th' first big rush comes they'll make a rich haul. Knew a trader that took five hundred blankets into th' Washoe country an' rented lots of 'em at a dollar a night. Sold shovels at nine dollars apiece. But them fellers will be lucky to pull their freight through 'Rapaho country without payin' toll. 'Rapahoes must be gittin' mad by this time.

"Let's bust ahead an' git some bread. Lived nine years once without eatin' bread."

"An' mebbe some Taos lightnin'," murmured Reason, smacking his lips.

By the time the trappers had slipped down into the bottom and gained the trail the four wagons were clear of the hill and moving along a comparatively level stretch. Now and then one would vanish as if sinking through the floor of the trail, then emerge from the hollow while the one behind took a turn at disappearing.

As the trappers drew near enough to be recognized for white men they waved their hats and advanced at a gallop. To their surprize the leading wagon came to a halt and was turned across the trail, while the remaining three were hurried up and arranged so as to complete a square. Then came a spurt of flame, and a bullet whined high overhead.

"—— fools!" snarled Reason, pulling in his horse. "Do we look like Injuns?"

California Joe had observed that the bullet traveled very high, and he took time to glance back up the ridge. To his surprize he beheld the forms of Indians moving among the scattered pines, some mounted, some afoot. Some wore silver trappings, which flashed bravely and advertised them to be Kiowas. Others were Arapahoes, the trapper declared; and added:

"Some whites have been raisin' th' devil with 'em. They're out for blood. They was signalin' for help an' Kiowas went to 'em. They've been trailin' us. Make for th' wagons, Tommy."

Whipping their horses and holding their open hands high above their heads, they galloped down on the wagons and rode full tilt among them. Throwing themselves to the ground, they seized their rifles and crawled under the foremost wagon to repel an attack. But the Indians had vanished.

As Joe stared at the ridge, knowing the red men were there but so cunningly concealed as to defy detection, a red-headed giant ran up to the wagon and yelled at the trappers:

"Owe us two scalps. If we hadn't woke ye up by shootin' over yer blamed heads ye'd been wiped out. Pretty birds to be ridin' loose in this country!"

"My friend ain't to blame for his looks, an' he's mighty touchy on th' p'int," Joe gravely informed the red-head as he emerged from under the wagon. "An' speakin' 'bout a person's looks, I don't see anything so all-fired han'some 'bout yer face, stranger."

"Ye chaw any more words like 'em an' I'll make yer teeth ache out on th' grass."

California Joe tossed his rifle to Reason, who now stood behind him, and was removing his belt when a crisp voice broke in:

"*Messieurs! Messieurs!* The shame to fight with yourselves!"

Joe wheeled and beheld a diminutive man, whose delicately molded features were destitute of beard and mustache and were the color of old ivory. This pallor was accented by the wealth of jet-black hair that fell to the shoulders. One glance and with a broad grin the trapper was extending his hand and greeting, "Laramie Pete, king o' traders!"

"*Mon Dieu! Le Bon Joe!* My old friend the brave California! My big babee boy! What you call it? Hoopala boy!" He seized Joe's big fist between his hands and shook it warmly.

"Ye little weasel! Sight of ye would cure warts. This feller's Tom Reason, my partner. Good feller, but talks too much."

"The big babee's friend! But yes. Good."

He clasped Reason's limp hand and shook it heartily. Then he hurriedly explained to the lowering giant:

"Old friend of my. California Joe. And M'sieu Reasong. Ver' big, brave men. My friends, behold Red Shirley. What you call a boss. Boss of my train. I trade. I do not boss trains."

Red Shirley's yellowish eyes revealed a warm desire to continue his quarrel with Joe. For the time he contented himself with saying—

"Of course yer friends has to be made welcome, Laramie, but——"

"But yes. It is true. It is my train. Head of a beaver! To meet them here!"

And again he shook their hands, and Reason edged away for fear of being kissed.

"But I don't hanker to see even yer friends come splurgin' in when they're bringin' Injuns ahind 'em. I don't give a tinker's —— for myself, but there's th' young lady to think about."

"Young lady!" softly exclaimed California Joe, while Reason ducked his head and looked uncomfortable. "A young lady! To be sure! But about them Injuns, red-head, don't ye lose no sleep. After I've had a bite to eat an' a snort o' something besides buf'ler-waller water I'll go out with Tommy an' shoo 'em away.

"They're Kiowas an' 'Rapahoes. Th' first won't want to stay long up here so far from their villages. 'Rapahoes prob'ly mad at something white men done to 'em in th' mountains; but a talk an' a few presents will sweeten 'em up."

"ANY Injuns to be driven away means I must chip in. Why didn't some one wake me?" drawled a voice inside a wagon.

Laramie Pete stepped to the wagon and with the air of an exhibitor raised the cover and revealed a young man reclining on a bale of goods. The young man, smiling pleasantly, slipped over the side to the ground. He was slim of build, and his fresh buckskin garments displayed much dandyism.

"My friends, this be my young friend, M'sieu James Herald. Ver' better known as Natchez. Named from ver' wicked town on the Messesseppe."

The trappers curiously studied Natchez and found that touch of daredevil spirit in the black eyes which makes for friends among wandering men. A certain flippancy in bearing was counteracted by the workmanlike weapons in his belt. If the contour of his features was almost too graceful the face was saved from being effeminate by the decisiveness of the jaw and the steady boldness of his gaze. Joe decided he would like him, and thrust out his hand. Reason arrived at a like conclusion. Natchez' slim hands flew out and performed a double grip.

"Sorter fetched company with you," he drawled, his eyes lighting mischievously as they took in the sour discontent on Shirley's face.

"Huh! Them fellers?"

And California Joe turned and stared contemptuously at the quiet ridge.

"Didn't know they was round till some one fired from th' wagons. I was jest tellin' red-head——"

"Red Shirley, when ye have to mention me. Call me out of my name ag'in an' I'll snake that black ha'r off'n yer head," wrathfully warned Shirley.

"But no dis'greeables, my friends," softly protested Laramie Pete, lifting hands as small and slim as a woman's, yet fearfully efficient when grasping the handle of a bowie-knife. "My girl. She asleep."

Natchez laughed silently and turned his gaze impudently on the wagon-boss. It was plain that there was bad blood between them. Then the young man quietly said:

"Take two to make a bargain. If California don't fancy the name you give yourself an' rather call you red-head, what's to hinder him?"

"Natchez, keep still," ordered Laramie Pete, while the men of the wagon crew ceased watching for Indians from under the wagons and began thrusting their heads out to witness the pending climax.

With an oath Red Shirley leaped toward Natchez, whose hands flew to his belt. But quicker than either was Reason, who stepped between the two, and, picking up Natchez, tossed him back into his wagon.

Shirley, for want of a victim, seized the trapper by the shoulders from behind. Before the onlookers could draw more than a breath Reason twisted and whirled and had his arms around the big man. Then their figures rocked from side to side for a moment, reminding one of two grizzly bears trying to dance, and Shirley was hurled under a wagon.

"Lawd, Tommy, but ye're brief!" loudly commended California Joe, eying his friend lovingly. "What I planned to do myself, but ye was too quick for me. Balsam firs!"

The botanical expression was in homage to the sudden appearance of a girl, small and dainty of figure, with Laramie's lustrous eyes and dark hair. She had emerged through the front of a wagon and was standing on the driver's seat, poised to leap over the wheel.

Like a jack-in-the-box Natchez shot from the wagon where he had been tossed, and landed lightly on his feet close to the group, a revolver in one hand, a knife in the other, his eyes flaming at the man who had handled him so ignominiously. Red Shirley, too, was back for a fight, a long butcher-knife clutched in his freckled hand. The girl remained motionless, one foot on the wheel, her hands resting on her hips, taking in the tableau.

"*Ma fille!* But you must stop the play, my friends!" cried Laramie.

"Fightin' ain't no sight for women!" bellowed Joe, catching Shirley by the knife hand and tripping him heavily on his back and twisting the weapon from his grasp. "An' ye hide them weapons, younker," he said to Natchez.

Natchez exposed his teeth in a feline snarl.

"Put up that knife and pistol, boy," shrilly commanded the girl. "And don't act silly any more, or you'll be very sorry."

Natchez glared impotently for a moment, then began to relax, his head sinking to his chest as he caught the impact of the

girl's angry gaze; and the weapons were restored to the belt. Leaping to the ground, she had barely lighted before Natchez was at her side humbly explaining—

"That chunk of a man threw me into the wagon."

"Next time ye begin makin' trouble when Injuns is round he'll throw ye over th' wagon," Joe informed him. "What sort of a outfit is this, anyway? Wagon-boss tryin' to make a kill. Younker wantin' to drink warm blood. Every one crazy but th' gal an' her paw."

"Just who might you be?" quickly inquired the girl, advancing toward Joe and giving Tom Reason a sidelong glance through her silken lashes that made him squirm and twist like a bashful boy.

Her father hastily named the trappers, explained that they were his old friends and briefly touched on the misunderstanding between the boss and the hot-headed Natchez. Incidentally he explained that the seemingly empty ridge at that moment concealed a considerable force of hostile Indians. Then he remembered to announce to the worshipful trappers that the girl's name was June La Blanche.

The men commenced crawling out from under the wagons to surround the little group. California Joe swept his eye over them, hoping to meet some old plainsman, but decided that they were largely riffraff, Shirley, now on his feet and doubly shamed at having been humiliated before his men, strode into the innermost group and informed Reason—

"Ain't no time to settle things now, but no man livin' can lay his dirty paws on me an' git clear with it."

Then to California Joe—

"As for ye, Mister Wild Man, after we yank this train out of this muss I'm goin' to comb that long ha'r of yers."

"Ha'r's pretty long. Th' combin' oughter be good," encouraged the trapper. "When ye git ready to start fussin' jest let me know an' ye'll be as welcome as beaver signs to a Hudson-Bay man."

Laramie waved his hands in despair, wailing:

"Talk! Talk! Talk! Holy blue! And the red men near to keel my girl!"

California Joe again surveyed the gaping circle of teamsters and wagon-men, and from their apprehensive manner of staring at the silent ridge satisfied himself for a second time that as Indian-fighters they were poor timber. As brawlers in a rough community they could be ferocious enough, but it was obvious that they were inexperienced in dealing with the first plainsmen.

The trapper shrewdly surmised that they were a rough-and-ready lot who had joined the train as affording them passage to the new gold-fields. Wheeling on Reason, who was gaping at the girl, he sternly ordered:

"Tommy, close yer meat-trap! No wonder ye git on Laramie's nerves. Sorry, miss, but he's that filled up with words he must be kept down, or he'd talk every one to death. Rushes at talkin' jest as a buf-'ler runs to eat flag-grass in an old beaver pond in late Fall. About th' Injuns, my friend 'n' I will drive 'em off."

"But you mustn't go out to find them!" protested the girl, suddenly deciding that she approved of the big trapper and his silent friend.

"I'll go with them," eagerly volunteered Natchez.

"Sonny, we'd like yer comp'ny jest like a hoss likes bitter cottonwood bark," dryly informed Joe.

Laramie, who by now had recovered his power of speech, expostulated:

"But, *m'sieu!* We are strong. We are seventeen men here. We ver' strong party. You must stay in here."

" 'Nother twenty-four hours an' this train's in a trap," quietly explained the trapper. "Ever watch buzzards circlin' in th' sky? One sees a feed an' drops down to earth. 'Nother, miles away, sees him drop an' invites himself to th' party. 'Nother, still farther off, sees number two git busy, an' follers him. So it goes, till ye've got all th' buzzards 'tween th' Missoury an' th' Rockies pilin' down on one dead bull.

"Th' Injuns up on that ridge are Kiowas an' 'Rapahoes. They'll be sendin' for help. Now th' 'Rapahoes have chipped in it won't be long afore th' Cheyennes take a hand. An' those fellers up there are *all* fighters. By tomorrer at this time they may be a hundred of them. We've got to drive 'em away an' dampen their courage."

"He's right," spoke up Red Shirley. "They're mighty quiet now, but they've got some game afoot. This train's got to be dragged into th' hills mighty soon.

When we can't take it no farther we must leave it."

One of the men in the background anxiously spoke up, declaring:

"We'll start tonight for th' mountains. We'll leave th' dod-blamed train right here."

The girl's eyes were uneasy as she glanced from her father's set face to the frightened crew. They were all practically Shirley's creatures. Shirley, too, shifted his facial expression. His yellow eyes glowed evilly as they fell on the girl.

"Don't go out and get killed and leave me here with those men," the girl whispered to Reason, resting a hand on his arm.

"——!" stuttered Reason, completely overwhelmed by the light hand on his arm.

Miss June continued whispering—

"I'm more scared to be left here than I am of the Indians."

Reason's eyes widened abnormally as he forced himself to meet her imploring gaze. He swallowed convulsively, timidly patted her hand and managed to mumble:

"Ye don't *sabe* Injuns. But it's all right. Everything's all right. I'll take one drink an' kill th' whole tribe."

NOW the ridge began to display signs of furtive life. Occasional glimpses of the enemy were to be caught as they glided from tree to tree or rode back and forth on their ponies at long rifle range. Laying aside his braggadocio, California Joe drew his friend apart from the crowd and muttered:

"These fellers ain't a got a fight in 'em. We got to think up some dodge. Even if we stand 'em off for a bit we can't git this train loose. Minute th' wagons stretch out we'll be surrounded an' wiped out like so many sheep. Wish them reds had small-pox!"

"Here they come!" howled one of the teamsters.

This because a band of mounted Kiowas made a sudden sally from the foot of the ridge and pretended to be on the point of charging.

"—— an' repeat. An' then twice for bad luck!" growled Joe as he walked back to the badly flustered crew. "Shirley, git yer men under th' wagons an' tell 'em not to shoot till they've got a red squintin' down th' inside their guns.

"Laramie, pick four men to stand by th' mules an' keep them from walkin' on us. If all ye fellers keep yer heads we'll soon see their backs."

But despite this reassuring promise the glance he cast toward the girl was filled with trouble.

The men began running to seek cover under the wagons, but none elected to remain with the mules to keep them from milling. Shirley called on some of the men by name to guard the stock, but only one responded, an aged plainsman who had long followed the fortunes of Laramie Pete.

"Pretty poor crew, eh?" commented Natchez as he stood by the head wagon and coolly watched the Indians maneuver on their ponies in hopes of drawing the fire of the train while their comrades on foot stole closer.

"No good," grumbled Joe. "It's for ye an' Laramie an' Shirley to look after th' stock. Heap up some bales o' goods for th' gal to stay behind. We'll have th' red devils inside th' wagons first thing we know."

"They're kickin' up a big dust," remarked Shirley.

The wind was blowing down the ridge and up the trail. Although the ridge was grassed over with a thin growth, small clouds of dust now began to float from the base of the slope and drift toward the wagons.

"Watch for th' men on foot to sneak close behind that dust," bellowed Joe. "They're creeping toward us and throwing up th' dirt as they come. Hi! See that feller empty a bag o' dust? Come on, Tommy; we'll open th' meat-market."

Seizing a rifle from a man who showed small intention of using it intelligently, the trapper crawled under the forward wagon while Laramie Pete and Natchez improvised a shelter for the girl. Tom Reason stuck by his partner, and as they watched the puffs of dust, under cover of which an Indian would leave a tree and scurry to another, or to a boulder, he muttered:

"Small-pox! That's th' idee. My snake medicine oughter git to workin' hard."

The mounted Kiowas had been racing down the trail and swerving back to the starting-point, never once coming within fair rifle-shot. But now that the foot men had taken advanced positions the galloping ponies were not checked, and a dozen voices beneath the wagons yelled—

"Here they come!"

The Indians afoot desperately tore loose the thin grass and tossed the dust-like soil into the air and the breeze whipped it toward the wagons. The leaders of the mounted detachment now entered the rifle zone and began emptying bags of dust in front of them. As a result only confused glimpses of the assailants could be obtained. With a carefully enunciated oath Reason stretched himself flat and fired into a dun-colored cloud.

Without pausing to see if he had registered he set about fire-loading.

Joe waited until a caprice of the steady breeze blew a hole through the dust, when he fired pointblank at a huge silver cross hung round a warrior's neck. The cross had been stolen from some Mexican church; and it proved bad medicine for the thief, for the bullet ended his career and sent him from the saddle. Dropping his rifle, Joe caught up the second gun and fired low, content to bring down a pony.

Laramie Pete ran from behind the wagon and standing exposed, emptied a carbine into the dust. Natchez, at the girl's behest, ran after him to drag him back to cover, but found the position exhilarating and remained to keep him company. Two hands shot from under the wagon and the foolhardy men found themselves dragged beneath the wagons, their ankles aching from the pressure of the muscular grasp.

Shirley shouted for help in managing the mules. Natchez and Laramie rolled from under the wagons on the inside and ran to help control the frightened brutes. Now the gun-fire was general from all sides of the square, and one bullet clipped within a few inches of Reason's head.

"If th' Injuns don't git us them fools will," he groaned. "Lawd, for a good case o' small-pox!"

He fired and shot a warrior through the thigh, but the wounded man clung like a leech to his mount and rode back out of range. Now the riders were flitting by on both sides of the square, firing from beneath their ponies' necks and riding so low that only the tip of a toe could be glimpsed.

"Take that painted one," barked Joe.

Reason accommodated him; and as the animal went down and the warrior started to run to ride double behind the nearest warrior, Joe picked him off with great neatness. The Indians, after riding by the train, wheeled and came back, but at a greater distance.

Almost all the shots fired by the teamsters had gone wild, but Shirley quit the mules long enough to score a pony and wound a brave, and the enemy were beginning to have more respect for the besieged. Back they tore up the trail, and as they gave ground the men on foot retreated to safety behind the pines.

" 'Rapahoes ain't got much heart for it," mused Joe. "All th' Kiowas are mounted."

As the retreating riders flew down the trail two of them leaned low from their animals and caught up the dead warrior by heels and neck and bore him off. Joe crawled out from under the wagon and made an inspection of the square. Two men were wounded with arrows and one shot dead through the neck with a bullet.

A huge ball from an old-time fusee had crippled a mule, and it was necessary to dispatch the poor beast. Joe returned to where Reason was keeping watch on the Indians and informed him:

"Looks bad. 'Rapahoes didn't do themselves credit. But th' Kiowas cut a notch for every one we cut. 'Rapahoes will do better next time. After they've chewed it over they'll see we didn't do th' damage our guns oughter done. Hear them fools yap."

This as the trainmen raised a triumphant shout and loudly told one another the Indians were sick of fighting and were retreating. Some of them even ran out in front of the forward wagon, defiantly discharged their guns at the foe and profanely dared them to come back and fight.

"Awful high speerits when they think it's all over," sneered Reason.

SUDDENLY the bold ones turned and scurried back behind the wagon. One warrior coming down the trail had been sufficient to send them to cover. He rode a pony that had imprints of the human hand painted on its chest and flanks in black, designating how the owner had thrown away his arms in battle to grapple with a foe, the most honorable coup he could count.

"Medicine man!" snapped Reason, poking his rifle forward.

Joe touched his arm and warned:

"Don't shoot. He's wavin' something white. Wants to talk. Keep me covered."

Saying this, he crawled from under the

wagon, leaving his rifle behind, walked down the trail a few rods and held up an empty hand. The medicine man checked his pony and loudly called—

"Can any white man stand in the path of a bullet or arrow and turn it aside?"

"I can," promptly claimed Joe in Kiowa. Then over his shoulder to Reason:

"They're lettin' a new warrior try out th' iron shirt, Tommy. Don't let any one chip in 'less they try to jump me."

"Then come to me and my medicine will eat you up," boasted the rider.

Joe cast a swift glance up the ridge and saw that the Arapahoes had ascended the slope out of range and were interested spectators of the scene. The Kiowas were still grouped in the far background, eager to witness the outcome of the meeting.

The warrior began singing a narrative of his life, rehearsing all his brave deeds and claiming that he was immune to death. As he chanted his pony pranced and curvetted, drawing closer to the trapper very gradually.

With his hand on his belt Joe slowly advanced. The buckskin shirt worn over the iron harness caused the warrior to appear to be a very powerful man. The trapper called out—

"Walking Wolf is careless to let a boy wear his medicine."

The warrior reached over his shoulder and pulled several arrows from their quiver. Two of these he held in his mouth, and two he thrust into his mass of hair. The fifth he set on the string. Then with a kick and a yell he urged his pony toward the trapper.

The superb bow of *bois d'arc* sent the arrow with almost the speed of a bullet. It whistled across the trapper's shoulder Another was on the string and the bow drawn nearly to the ear when the trapper fired from his hip at the pony, hitting him in the flank and causing him to rear madly; and the arrow sailed harmlessly toward the clouds.

During the few seconds in which the Indian was compelled to devote all his attention to controlling his mount the trapper ran to close quarters. In desperate haste the Indian loosed an arrow that tore a hole through the fringed skirt of the trapper's buckskin shirt. Then with a shout of defiance the Indian stretched out his arms to give a clear path to his breast, but the trapper fired at the bronzed throat and the wearer of the iron shirt fell forward on his pony's neck as limp as a bag of meal.

The trapper ran to catch the pony; but the intelligent animal wheeled and raced down the trail, carrying his dead master's body beyond the white man's reach. Shouts and cheers from the wagons were returned by doleful howling and screams of rage from the Kiowas. The Arapahoes remained silent and made no move to join in a second attack.

The Kiowas began trotting sedately toward the wagon, saving their speed until within striking-distance. Joe stalked toward the wagons, too proud to run, yet listening most keenly for the telltale sound of hurrying hoofs. Now to his amazement Tom Reason rode from behind the wagon and cantered to meet him.

"Git back, ye idiot! I don't need any help!" cried Joe.

"Never say ag'in that that snake medicine ain't a hummer!" greeted Reason, holding something up in his hand and waving a white rag with the other.

"Git back! What ye up to with that white rag? They won't pay no 'tention to it, I tell ye. They're comin' with blood in both eyes. 'Rapahoes don't want to take a hand. Under th' wagon, I tell ye."

"They've stopped. All but two have dropped back. They'll talk even if they won't smoke. I tell ye th' snakeskin is backin' me. I'm goin' to play it out."

With a spring Joe gained the horse and vaulted up behind his partner. Then he cheerfully said:

"All right. Two of 'em. Two of us. Go ahead. But what ye expect to do with a bottle o' rainwater beats me."

"Snake medicine told me to do it," solemnly replied Reason as he slowly approached the representatives of the Kiowas. With great boldness he advanced until within a rod of the two warriors, one of whom was old Walking Wolf, now very angry that the iron shirt had failed to protect life.

Walking Wolf was spokesmen. Haughtily he demanded:

"Do you come to say you will give up your guns and wagons? Or must we kill you all except the woman?"

For once Reason was forced to talk, as Joe had no idea what he contemplated. He gravely replied:

"We come to give you your lives. If it were only a matter of the Kiowas we might let you all die. But if you die then the Arapahoes and the Cheyennes, the Comanches and the Apaches must die, and that will make the big chief's heart very sad. The Kiowas remember the Small-pox Winter?"

The unexpected query left Walking Wolf dumb for a few moments. His companion, less quick to school his countenance, betrayed great uneasiness. The question was put for rhetorical effect, for there was no Kiowa, no plains Indian of thirty years of age, who did not remember the terrible disaster which overwhelmed the plains tribes from 1837 to 1840.

Walking Wolf was old enough to remember the first epidemic of 1818, when the dread disease was brought to them by visiting Osage. But only twenty years had elapsed since small-pox broke out on the Upper Missouri, reducing the Mandans within a few weeks from sixteen hundred to thirty-one Indians, while the Arikaras and Minnetarees were reduced from four thousand to two thousand. In all, that epidemic had cost the plains Indians one-third of their number. No; there was no need to ask the Kiowas if they remembered the terrible scourge.

"Why does the white man ask foolish questions?" Walking Wolf finally demanded.

"Because we will give you your lives so that the Arapahoes, who are friendly to the whites, may live."

This was proclaimed with a volume that carried to the listening Arapahoes.

"We would have the Blue-Cloud people wake up from their bad dream and go back to their women and children. Do you see this?"

He held up the small bottle of liquid and shook it until it foamed. Walking Wolf stared at it intently, his small eyes fixed as if hypnotized. He bowed his head. Reason calmly explained:

"This contains the small-pox spirit. If I open it the evil spirit is again loose on the plains. Does the old Wolf believe me, or shall I prove it?"

And he seized the stopper.

"Wait!" gasped Walking Wolf.

He suspected a trick, but the horrors of '37 were painted indelibly on his savage mind. Small-pox was considered to be a white man's disease. That they should have control of the disease was perfectly logical. This the more so as the epidemics did not decrease the number of whites.

"Let me talk with my people," he requested.

"Be quick," urged Reason.

The two Kiowas wheeled their ponies and rode back to their friends, signaling that the truce continued. The Arapahoes, some of those nearest the party having overheard Reason's threat, began stealing back along the ridge to join the Kiowas in council. California Joe stared admiringly at the back of his partner's head, and exclaimed:

"Dawg-gone ye, Tommy! Never 'lowed ye had any brains afore!"

"My snake medicine," modestly insisted Reason. "I could see we was done up if they kept to the fightin'. Th' gal worried me. Then th' snake spoke up jest as clear as a bell an' told me to mix some flour an' water in a bottle an' tell 'em it was small-pox. They'll always have a sly notion we fooled 'em, but there ain't one in th' whole Kiowa nation, not even Dohasan himself, that dares prove we're liars. That's th' beauty o' this game. Here they come!" Walking Wolf and his one companion trotted toward them slowly, the open hand held high. Reason held up the hand holding the bottle. The aged medicine man shuddered as he gazed on it. Reining in a rod from the whites, he abruptly announced:

"The Kiowa ride back to their village at once. The Cloud Men (Arapahoes) send this talk to the white men—that they have no trouble with them and will now go to hunt buffalo."

"Does the Wolf and his friends wish to smoke a calumet of peace before we part?" asked California Joe.

Walking Wolf winced and threw his open right hand forward and outward with the palm to the front, the Kiowa sign for a decisive negative. Reason said:

"Then let the Kiowas and the Arapahoes ride off. If they come near the train again the bottle will be broken and the evil sickness let loose."

THE Indians whisked their ponies about and raced back to their friends. The white men, Joe now afoot, slowly returned to the wagons. The wagon-crew were all grouped in front of

the forward wagon, greatly excited and completely puzzled as to what it all meant.

"Injuns quit," cried Joe. "Soon's they start I'll scout after 'em a few miles to make sartain; then ye can hitch up an' straighten out, Laramie."

"My snake medicine done it," boasted Reason.

"Th' runt sartainly had strong medicine," affirmed Joe to the bewildered men. "Now ye all jest wait an' I'll git my hoss an' ride over the ridge."

"But M'sieu Joe! It is ver' grand magic!" exclaimed Laramie.

"It's a mighty smooth game if it works," agreed Natchez dubiously.

"Yas, if it works," sneered Red Shirley.

"Seein's believin'," curtly suggested Reason, nodding toward the Indians who were making up the ridge.

Joe procured his horse and slowly rode down the trail. Arriving at the point where the parley had been held, he turned up the ridge and disappeared among the pines. At the end of an hour he cantered back, swinging his hat and announcing:

"Cleared out! Ye can pull stakes when ye want to, Laramie."

But now that the Indian menace was eliminated, Laramie Pete found he had fresh trouble on his hands. The teamsters and wagon-men had withdrawn and discussed the situation among themselves. Now they swarmed around the trader, Red Shirley acting as spokesman. He truculently began—

"This business has teached us, Laramie, that we can't take this train no farther."

This astounding announcement left Laramie Pete speechless for a moment. Then he managed to protest:

"But, M'sieu Shirley, la Rouge! My wagons filled wis my goods! Behold them!"

"Behold nothin' 'cept our ha'r," returned Shirley. "We won't risk our sculps jest to save four wagons o' trade goods. No, siree! Ain't that right, boys?"

The readiness and heartiness with which the rough chorus of approval greeted this decision showed its careful rehearsal.

Quivering though he was with rage and with fear of losing his goods, Laramie made a mighty effort to remain calm. After a struggle he reminded the others:

"We meet at Fort Laramie. I say my wagons need men. You say you get men and take my wagons through. You say you want to go to the new gold-fields. Ver' anxious to go, and be my wagon-boss. Is it not so?"

"No use chawin' over that," growled Shirley. "I was keen to come; an' ain't I here? But when th' whole Kiowa nation begin hootin' an' shootin' I'm through with wagons. These men are good fellers at scratchin' pay gravel, but they don't hanker to fight Injuns. Ye can pack some o' th' truck on mules, burn th' rest, an' strike into th' hills with us."

"We're all through with standin' off Injuns, mister," bawled one of the men.

California Joe took him by the neck, threw him to one side and asked—

"How many men can ye count on, Laramie, besides me 'n' Reason?"

Laramie tore his hair and wailed—

"Myself, Natchez, Old Missouri, and—that's all, M'sieu Joe."

"Ye can count on me," spoke up a man whose thin face wore a perpetual expression of melancholy.

"*Merci*, M'sieu Long Slim! You I count in," said Laramie, smiling radiantly.

"I can drive. I can shoot," cried Miss June, her face flushed with indignation at the behavior of the men.

Natchez, who had been listening with a twisted grin marring his face, now sidled toward Red Shirley and advised—

"Hold them to their contract with the point of a gun, Papa Laramie!"

"No, no," protested Joe. "They ain't worth what water there is in ——. Tom an' me will stick along. Takes us a little out of our way, but that don't count. Let these skunks cut loose when they will. Ye may have to burn yer wagons, Laramie, but not yet. How's that, Tommy, ol' hoss?" Reason hung his head, then stole a shy glance at the vivacious Miss June and chuckled foolishly.

"Yep, Laramie. Tommy will stick," dryly assured Joe. "Hitch up an' strike due west, where we can soon find good grass an' water. Then we'll camp an' make plans for tomorrer."

CHAPTER VI

ON THE WAY TO CHERRY CREEK

THE route of the little caravan was now nearly due west, following a course to be soon covered by the stage-coach, when Russell, Majors and Waddell would establish

a daily service between St. Joseph and Denver on a six-day schedule. California Joe told Laramie they should strike Cherry Creek about fifteen miles from the mining hamlet of Denver and follow the creek down. He scouted ahead and Reason guarded the rear. Although assured that there was nothing further to fear from Indians the trainmen were unnerved and would have quickly used up the mules in their frantic haste to surmount the intervening ridges had not Laramie and Natchez restrained them.

But as the wagons crawled over ridge after ridge the dread of an Indian ambush gave way to wild hilarity. Each lagging mile brought them that much nearer to this last El Dorado Red Shirley, who had been sullen and indifferent, suddenly reasserted himself as wagon-boss, and the men obeyed him with zestful cheerfulness.

Laramie was highly pleased and believed that all his troubles were over. Even Natchez commented optimistically on the changed attitude of the men.

Miss June, however, was not so easily satisfied. She studied the crew gravely, two interrogation points creasing her fair forehead. As Reason rode closer to the train she mounted her pony and dropped back to join him.

This move brought to the taciturn trapper an experience which was more nerve-tingling than any Indian danger he had encountered. He could look back over twenty years of wandering and enumerate on the fingers of his two hands all the white women of her caste he had met. The fingers of one hand would suffice for those with whom he had exchanged speech. So her approach was an almost overwhelming confusion as well as a wonderful pleasure.

She was not an object to inspire love in his rugged heart; for she was something so different, so frail and dainty, that he likened her to a celestial medicine, and forthwith worshiped her.

Had Miss June been set on making him talk she would have fared ill in the venture. Being perfectly agreeable to assume all the conversation, she found his companionship quite ideal.

With a friendly nod she was babbling away as if they had been lifelong acquaintances, asking questions and answering them for him. After a first gush of generalities, and having satisfied herself that her presence was welcome, she described the changed demeanor of the men and added that her father and Natchez interpreted it as a desire to atone for recent behavior.

"Wolves don't change, miss," Reason managed to say.

"Just what I was telling myself, Mr. Reason," she said. "Something has happened, or been planned, that makes them light-hearted."

"Rum?" suggested Reason, moistening his lips with a slight smack.

She shook her head. "The liquor is in one wagon, and Natchez has charge of it. Nothing like that. Of course they think only of finding lots of gold. Yet there's something else. They have queer ways of glancing at each other. We girls looked that way in school at St. Louis, when we were fooling the teachers.

"They've come to some understanding. Shirley was deep in the sulks; now he's very much the wagon-boss."

"I'll drag a eye over 'em," promised Reason. "How d'ye come to git out here on th' plains, miss?"

The question caused him great effort. His tanned face grew hot as he realized his boldness; and deep in his heart he felt more pride for his temerity than as if he had counted some tremendous mountain coup.

The streams of her speech were bank full again. She told him of her school life, described certain short trips with her father, boasted of being one-sixteenth Arapaho blood, and shyly announced a preference for Natchez. This last visit to the plains resulted from her father's plan to follow the immigrant road to the Salt Lake settlements, where she was to be left with friends while her father pushed on to the Carson Valley and the Washoe country. Rumors were very plentiful concerning fabulous finds of silver in that region.

If on reaching Salt Lake Valley the Mormon leaders should satisfy her father that the silver prospects were exaggerated and the boom on the decline, then the goods would be traded in the valley and cargo of furs secured for the return trip to St. Joseph.

"Reckon there's silver there all right. Joe 'n' me has known it for years, even when them fellers was doin' nothin' but placer minin'," broke in Reason. "Ye can find it in sheets, like lead. Some o' them dawg-goned fools use to think it was lead.

Joe 'n' me use to laff at 'em. Fallin' over silver an' not knowin' it!"

"Then why didn't you and Mr. Joe locate claims?" she asked, round-eyed.

"Who? Me? Lawd! what would I do with it? If I could swap a silver-mine for a lake o' whisky located at th' foot of a mountain o' terbaccer I might hunt silver. But I never see anything yet took from th' ground that ye could eat, drink, smoke or wear. Too heavy to cart round, is silver."

"Father doesn't care much if new fields are rich or poor," she naively confessed. "All he asks is to get there with his stock before the crowd finds out the truth. He saw the Frazier River rush, ending in nothing, and he made a good trade. He's a trader. He never goes after silver or gold except as he trades for it. Let him get in while a rush is on and his iron skillets are worth their weight in silver. A rush may be all borrasco for the miners and yet all bonanza for him."

Much of the rest she had to tell had been narrated already by Laramie. Yet repetitions from her lips were sweet music in Reason's ears. Her father's men had deserted at Fort Laramie to try their luck in the Colorado diggings. The Missouri River talk was of nothing but the great fortunes awaiting the bold of heart. After his crew quit him the trader had been unable to hire a new crew for the Mormon country, and had finally accepted Shirley's offer to take the wagons through to the infant town cradled by the turbulent South Platte and bisected by Cherry Creek.

"If the men desert us can we take the wagons through, Mr. Reason?" she asked.

"We'll make a spoon or spile a horn," he replied, glancing at her, then quickly turning aside.

"My father's risking much on this venture."

"Oh, he'll clean th' platter all right, miss."

"Do you think the men can be trusted? Will Shirley be satisfied simply to leave us and go on ahead?"

"Oh, sartainly. He likes yer pa an' we folks like a Pawnee loves a Cheyenne."

"You're speaking sarcastic."

"Lawd, miss, I didn't go for to swear," he apologized, his face burning with consternation. "I jest went for to say that Shirley an' his crowd smell 'bout as good to me as a Kiowy camp in August. But don't ye fret. Me 'n' ol' California will see ye through flyin'. We hold th' keerds, an' them white-livered pups has got to draw some to beat us."

This, for Reason, was a record-breaking speech. Realization of the fact rather appalled him. He collapsed conversationally; nor could she induce him to speak again except in monosyllables.

Misconstruing his silence as a distaste for her further company, Miss June rode ahead and joined the wagons just as Shirley gave the order to halt and make camp near a small stream.

CALIFORNIA JOE rode in as Reason came up from the rear. The mules were grazing and the men were boisterously gathering fuel for the camp-fires.

"Ye could make a few miles more mighty easy," commented Joe.

Shirley whirled on him and harshly reminded him—

"I'm wagon-boss here, and I'll stand no chin-talk from any outsider."

Joe's eyes glowed, but he held his tongue. Finding Laramie, he asked if the men's high spirits could be due to rum rations. The trader said it was impossible.

"Then there's some game on," declared the trapper. "If they was drunk I could understand all this hippity-hoop business. Injuns will sing their *Hay-al Hay-al* jest to keep in practise; but them fellers won't chirp up 'less they're drunk or thinkin' up deviltry."

"The worst to happen, M'sieu Joe, is for them to leave us," said Laramie. "But Long Slim, ver' brave man, may hear things. I'll speak to him."

The trader strolled carelessly about among the men until he found himself by the side of the disgruntled-looking Slim. To Slim he murmured a few words. Slim said something from the corner of his mouth and continued his gloomy study of the heights ahead. Laramie returned to Joe and reported:

"He says something is up, but he doesn't know what. The men don't trust him because he said he would stick by me."

"Let 'em plan. We'll watch," growled Joe. "But I'll be derned if I can figger their game 'less they think to steal th' wagons, which would be foolishness."

He went in search of Reason and apprised him of his suspicions. Joe found his

friend seated near the girl's wagon, raptly listening to her and Natchez softly singing negro melodies. It was with difficulty that Joe got him to one side and explained his bewilderment over the crew's strange behavior.

Reason promptly pulled his knife and avowed his intentions of preventing any treachery by the simple safeguard of cutting Shirley's throat. Joe had induced him to restore his weapon when a movement of the men in a body at the other end of the camp sent him on the run to learn what was happening.

He found Laramie leaning negligently against a wheel, his thumbs hooked in his belt, his lustrous eyes studying the red face of Shirley. Back of the wagon-boss crowded the men.

Shirley announced—

"Pete, th' boys has a word to say, an' they asked me to speak it for 'em."

He paused; Laramie nodded for him to continue. Shirley cleared his throat and announced:

"We don't think we've had a square deal. We risk our lives to git ye an' yer freight to th' mountains where ye'll clean up a fortune."

"But behold! I pay you wages!"

"Wages! Bah! An' ye makin' a fortune," cried Shirley, striving to work himself up into a rage.

"But, *m'sieu*, at Fort Laramie you said——"

"Ye listen to what I'm sayin' *now*," Shirley viciously interrupted. "We want a share in this business. We 'low we've earned it, offerin' our lives to pretect yer property. Long 'n' short of it all is, we want a third o' th' profits."

"If I say no?"

"Wal, ye're out here in a rough country with yer gal. I don't say we'd dig out an' leave ye alone. I don't say I could even keep th' reins over th' men an' stop 'em from takin' what they 'low to be theirs. I jest say we want a third o' th' profits. Not a bit less."

Laramie was meditating over this veiled threat to do violence to him and his when California Joe innocently asked:

"Why'n sin do ye fellers work for nothin' for? Why don't ye take all th' goods as yer pay?"

Shirley's huge frame seemed to swell with passion as he hoarsely reminded the other:

"There ain't no Injuns round now, ye prairie tramp. 'Nother mouthful o' words out o' yer trap an' I'll lambaste ye so ye won't give any lip to no one for two months."

Natchez, deadly pale, glided toward the speaker, but Joe flung him back and Reason's long arms held him helpless. Joe suggested:

"Then s'pose we settle th' *di*fuglety in that way? Ye 'n' me will have a little b'ar tussle. If ye win Laramie gives ye a third share in th' outfit. If I win ye keep th' men to work till we hit Cherry Crick. Is that a go, Laramie?"

Laramie Pete knew the trapper of old. His French cunning instantly took charge of the situation. He hesitated and looked very dubious, as if reluctant to risk a third of his goods on the speaker's prowess.

"Of course if ye're scared—" said Joe.

"It is a great risk," mumbled Laramie. "You are one brave man, *m'sieu*. But how do I know how you can fight this big mountain of a man? If with rifle, or pistol, or knife, if against Indians, yes; I'd stake my whole train. But this fight you name——"

"Th' fight he names he'll go through with, profits or no profits," yelled a teamster. "If Shirley don't take him on I will."

Red Shirley shot an oath at the speaker, then fell to comparing his bulk with that of the trapper. Joe's unusual height gave him an appearance of leanness. Shirley knew that his own physique was that of an oak. As a knife or gun fighter he sought no trouble with the trapper. But when it came to fisticuffs he believed he could quickly polish off his man.

"Ye 'greeable to what he says?" he asked of Laramie.

"He is my friend. His honor is mine," groaned Laramie. "*Bien!* Let it be so."

Then to Miss June—

"*Ma fille*, withdraw to your wagon."

A slight doubt as to the wisdom of the wager stirred sluggishly in the back of Red Shirley's slow mind. He had animal confidence in plenty, and yet he was conscious of a lack of relish. He was convinced that he could overwhelm the tall trapper, but there persisted a shadow of uneasiness lest he had been inveigled into playing the other man's game.

Red endeavored to shake the feeling from him, for his leadership of the rough band demanded that he be always ready to

discourage any one who questioned his superiority.

His men were eagerly forming a circle, and their precipitate action gave him relief; for it took from him the responsibility of making a decision. The girl was slowly retreating to her wagon. Natchez was dancing around the ring, his eyes flaming riotously, the lust for battle causing him to yearn for some affront; only he would never fight with his bare hands.

With his confidence unshaken as to the outcome Shirley peeled off his flannel shirt, threw his belt of weapons aside and stood forth, a hairy behemoth of a man. The grunts of admiration rising from the circle caused him to entertain something of his old spirit, but he could not completely oust from his mind the suspicion that he was playing the other man's game.

With a howl of rage Reason suddenly seized California Joe, brushed him aside and demanded:

"My meat! Git back, ye long shadder of a man!"

"Be ye crazy?" snapped Joe; and Reason read something in the challenger's baleful glance that warned him to subside, although he would not cease his mumbling.

This incident brought a grin to Shirley's face. Reason was afraid for his friend. It was a good omen. The wagon-boss preferred fighting the tall trapper to the short one.

Laramie Pete climbed on a wagon-stead, placed two revolvers beside him and said:

"*Messieurs*, the best man will win. Each fights as he will. You will put all weapons one side. I will kill the first man who meddles. Make the ring wider."

Shirley stared at him thoughtfully, wondering what the slight smile meant. When the combat was first suggested the trader had displayed reluctance. Which was assumed, the hint of secret amusement, or the hesitance?

Shirley's mental processes were slow, but they were now arriving at the conclusion that he was being made game of in some fashion. However, a glance at the trapper, now divested of his buckskin shirt and belt, revealed no cause for worry. Only passably courageous where a knife or gun was used, the wagon-boss knew himself to be in his true element when the issue depended upon brawn and beef and cruel tricks.

Laramie's cool smile and his eager, expectant eyes were irritating, nevertheless. It offset his exultation at Reason's desire to take his friend's place.

"I'm waitin' to be slaughtered," grinned Joe, stepping into the circle.

Then, lifting a hand for attention, he demanded:

"If I win out all ye men agree to stick by th' wagons till we make Cherry Crick. Do ye all say so?" His finger swept from man to man, holding up each, until each had orally promised to abide by the outcome of the contest.

"All right then. Laramie, no more frettin' 'bout yer train. Come on, ye red sheep, an' be hugged by ol' grampa grizzly!"

This boastful speech affected Shirley none; for it was customary for combatants to talk in hyperbole when describing their own might. Defiant speech couched in grotesque exaggerations was as ceremonial as the circle in which they fought. But Laramie continued showing his white teeth in a little smile of amusement.

NOW the last exchange of taunts was made, the last ridiculous boast loudly registered, and the circle held its breath. Faced by actualities, Shirley became all beast and forgot the thing gnawing at his peace of mind. With a wild yell he began circling his opponent. The yell was his reaction to race instinct, and was intended to function as the red man's war-whoop, or the jungle beast's scream or roar, is purposed; that is, in a paralysis of the enemy.

"Save yer wind, ye poor fool," advised California Joe, taking a long stride forward.

With a howl of genuine rage Red Shirley rushed forward in his most efficient style of rough-and-tumble fighting, his knees flying up with force sufficient to knock the wind out of a mule, his mighty arms flying like pistons, his red head held low, his confidence superb, now that he tasted battle, that no harm could break through his battering arms and fists. With a shrill screech that would have done credit to a catamount California Joe leaped three feet into the air, and was back on his feet by the time Shirley sprang forward to catch him off the ground and off his guard.

Shirley doubled his powerful arms at the elbow, his two fists meeting a foot from the thick chest, his purpose being to bear his opponent backward and at the same time

bring up his knee with murderous force. But the trapper became as light as a mountain cat and was out of reach of the terrible knee, and his hands darted in and clutched the two wrists.

With a mighty wrench he yanked Shirley forward and all but threw him on his face. But Shirley managed to keep his feet under him and slow up his forward plunge until he could exert his great strength and twist his wrists free. He surged backward, his wrists instantly were released, but before he could raise an arm he received a terrific clout on the side of his flaming red head.

The blow seemed powerful enough to drop a buffalo, but Shirley only staggered a bit to one side, shook his head and hissed: "Now I know th' worst ye can do. I'll break both yer legs for that."

With the crow of a cock that has cleared the walk the trapper repeated his high jump, flapping his arms against his sides and giving an air of burlesque to the whole affair. Red Shirley shifted his tactics and approached more gingerly, yet determinedly.

He was beginning to believe that there was a difference between the average post brawlers and this product of the mountains and plains. Yet he must believe the evidence of his eyesight. There was no man living of the trapper's build who could withstand him once he got his arms around him, he told himself. There would be strange tricks and Indian dodges to guard against, but these would avail nothing once they came to grips. California Joe suddenly lost his braggadocio and began edging away. Shirley grinned murderously.

"I'm goin' to fill yer whiskers full o' white feathers," he promised as he followed the trapper around the circle.

"What's the matter with your friend, Laramie?" wailed Natchez. "Oh, won't somebody let me fight!"

"M'sieu Joe will fight, I am ver' sure," soothed Laramie.

Reason turned his head aside that none might see him smile expansively.

"No more foot-racin', ye ——" jeered Shirley, finishing with the unprintable.

The circle was first stunned, then left gasping in bewilderment. It was as if the trapper's tall form were filled with a mighty spring tightly coiled, and that Shirley's taunt had released the coil, sending the trapper flying upward and then downward upon the wagon-boss like a gigantic frog.

As he lighted on Shirley his legs and arms moved so swiftly as to defy eyesight. He had become a fearful mechanism, cheating the vision by his celerity of action. The two men became blurs, fragmentary pictures that suggested vibrations.

Then for a moment Shirley's astounded visage was seen as he sought to brace himself and obtain a fulcrum from which to exploit his great strength. Next the trapper was standing alone, smiling broadly, and the wagon-boss was reclining on the ground, staring foolishly at the sky.

Reason laughed in a deep bass. Laramie smoothed out his features. Young Natchez flushed red as he remembered his anxiety, and sought to cover his embarrassment by calling Shirley a red pig and offering to fight any of his followers.

Reason had no relish for this abuse, and picking him up he carried him, kicking and screaming wild threats, to the girl's wagon and threw him inside. On returning to the circle he found Joe explaining:

"Jest ordinary plains style with mountain trimmin's. I ain't hurt him bad. Eyes 'n' teeth all there. No bones busted, not even a finger. Throw a pail o' water over him an' he'll be ready for grub. He ain't used to our wild-cat style o' endin' trouble. He's a good man at Fort Laramie or Kearney, but he mustn't mix up with mountain men that lick grizzlies with their bare hands. Wal, that's 'bout th' way it seems to be, Laramie."

The men silently picked Shirley up, carried him to the bank of the creek and threw cold water on him. In twenty minutes he was on his feet and giving orders, no worse for his battle with the exception of a black eye and various knobs and bunches on his head, which his red hair concealed.

Inside the wagon Natchez' wrathful declarations of war against Reason persisted for half a minute, then died down. When he came back to the fire his handsome face was very sheepish.

"Girl says I mustn't," he laconically explained to Reason.

"Mighty bright gal," observed Reason.

THE episode seemed to be closed. The men attended to their duties quietly, but their leader kept aloof from Laramie and his friends. California Joe expressed it as his opinion that the men

would ignore their bargain and desert on the morrow, leaving the wagons to be taken in by Long Slim, Old Missouri, Laramie and Natchez, with the speaker and Reason acting as scouts.

Unless attacked by Indians Joe assured his hearers that the wagons would go through, although making slow progress. It would be necessary for all to concentrate on one wagon at a time when descending some of the numerous ridges, and in fording various creeks. So the night closed in with Laramie Pete's mind at peace.

Joe and Reason scouted around the camp during the early evening hours and reported no signs of Indians. The usual guard of two men was ordered. The trappers stood the first watch from nine until eleven, being relieved by Shirley and Laramie. These two went back to their blankets at one in the morning, after calling Natchez and Long Slim.

Old Missouri, who was to go on duty at three with one of the teamsters, awoke automatically on the hour and waited some minutes to be called. Receiving no summons, he crawled from his blankets and first proceeded to renew the fire, for the night was cold. Then he went in search of the sentinels.

He found young Natchez bound to a wagon-wheel, tied hand and foot and gagged. A long scalp-wound explained how he had been made a prisoner without giving an alarm.

MISSOURI set up a shouting, but only the trappers and Laramie responded. By that time Natchez was released and was trying to say something about Long Slim.

"Where's t' others?" cried Reason.

"Vamoosed! Long Slim must 'a' gone with 'em."

"No!" hoarsely gasped Natchez between his swollen lips. "He was honest! He was game!"

"Then they had a fight," muttered Joe. "An' it's mighty cur'ous it didn't wake me up. Must 'a' been a powerful quick one. Come on, Tommy! Scout!"

The two gathered pine branches from the stock of fuel and used them for torches. Accompanied by Old Missouri they had advanced but a few rods when they came to Long Slim's body on the bank of the creek. He had been knifed through the heart. That he had not died without striking a blow in his own defense was proved by a sanguinary blade clutched in his right hand.

By the aid of the torches the trappers cast about and found the trail. The deserters had crossed the creek afoot and were traveling in the direction of Cherry Creek. They followed the trail for a few hundred feet and then halted by the body of a teamster who had been killed by a knife through the neck. A slight attempt had been made to cover the corpse with brush, but only a beginning had been made.

Satisfied that the men had stolen none of the mules, Joe led the way back to the wagons and reported what they had found. Natchez said that all he knew of the tragedy was that he came to his senses and found himself tied and gagged. He had not seen nor heard anything suspicious. He denied he had been guilty of falling asleep.

"I was just about to light my pipe. That's the last thing I remember," was his conclusion.

Missouri searched the ground where Natchez had been posted and soon returned with a pipe, freshly filled, and a storm match. Joe reconstructed the affair.

"Ye was 'bout to light yer pipe when one o' them stole up behind ye without a sound an' lambasted ye on th' head. They made no noise in layin' ye out or in tyin' and gaggin' ye.

"But they didn't have such good luck with poor Slim. They jumped him, prob'ly two of 'em, one catchin' at his throat to stop his makin' a bleat. But while they was shuttin' off his wind he soaked one feller through th' throat; then they wiped him out an' took th' dead man over th' crick. They started to hide th' body, got skeered an' pushed on. We couldn't find any sign o' mules."

"Not one gone. Everything is as it should be," spoke up Laramie. "It is ver' much puzzling, M'sieu Joe. They could walk away any time if they were dogs enough to break their promise, but behold the way they go! In the night, with murder on their souls.

"They say they want a third of my profits. They go without taking even their wages. They go afoot. Before they go they strike down! They keel! *Sacré feu!* May they roast where it is ver' hot! They are crazy men."

"If they'd done for Joe we'd say Shirley

wanted to git even with him," mused Reason. "There's no sense in their killin' Long Slim. Yet men don't do such things 'less there's something behind it."

"Nothing is stolen," repeated Laramie.

"But why kill Slim?" persisted Reason, his shaggy brows contracting. "They didn't kill Natchez. They could 'a' waited till mornin' an' gone off with all of us watchin' 'em. They started to go like Injuns.

"They was 'fraid Natchez would discover they was leavin', so they fetched him a crack. Then they ran into Slim. Of course; that's it. Poor Slim tried to stop 'em."

"But why? They were free like birds," interrupted Laramie.

" 'Cause they was cartin' something off they didn't have any right to touch," triumphantly concluded Reason.

"Is th' gal all right?" demanded Joe.

"She was in the wagon when I left it after Missouri called out," assured Laramie. "Ho, *ma petite* June!" summoned the fond father.

"Wait a minute!" she replied.

Joe breathed in deep relief. He had been assailed by a sudden fear that something had happened to her. Miss June from behind the wagon covering had followed the excited exclamation and Joe's report of finding Long Slim's body.

Even before the trapper could fully present his views of the tragedy her quick mind had rejected any theory except one that included some crime committed previous to the murder and desertion. The homicide was to prevent a premature discovery of the first crime. As no one had been killed up to the time of Long Slim's death the offense must be one against property. But the mules had not been disturbed. It would have been impossible to steal any goods from the wagons without arousing the camp; and doubly impossible to make away with anything of value without the mules.

Her rapid process of elimination had narrowed to a point when her father called out to her. As she answered him she felt under the wagon seat and opened the stout box in which her father carried an emergency stock of gold. The moment her hands felt of the cover and told her it had been opened by force rather than by key, she knew she would find it empty.

Thrusting her head from under the canvas she softly informed, "The money in the box is gone, *mon père*."

"Gone! Ten thousand dollars in gold gone! But it can not be!" exclaimed Laramie, running to the wagon.

After a brief examination of the strongbox he came back to his friends and quietly announced:

"*Voilà!* It is so. But how could they take it when we sleep in the wagon? It is a miracle! It is black magic!"

California Joe quickly dispelled any suggestion of mystery by declaring:

"Dead easy. They couldn't take it while ye an' th' gal bunked in there. An' they wouldn't risk stickin' with th' train after they'd took it. They got it afore we made camp. What better time could they ask for then when we was standin' off th' Injuns?

"Havin' it in their paws, they made a bleat 'bout takin' third o' th' profits. If they could 'a' made ye knuckle under, or I'd been licked an' ye was forced to make good, then they'd say th' gold went toward their share, an' they wouldn't been skeered of havin' ye jump 'em some time at a fort or in a minin'-camp. If they'd waited till mornin' to go ye'd think it queer if they went without their wages. An' if they asked for 'em it might lead to yer lookin' in th' box.

"So they planned to sneak away tonight. They're near 'nough to make th' gold diggin's without mules.

"First they beat Natchez over th' head. Then they got th' gold from where they'd cached it in another wagon. Jest then they ran into Slim, who was cur'ous to know what they was cartin' off. He tried to raise a hullabaloo an' they shet off his wind. He got in one jab with his bowie; then they rubbed him out."

Laramie nodded and softly said:

"They owe me ten thousand dollars."

"That isn't much. It can be paid back from one pocket of nuggets."

"They also owe for Long Slim's life. It will take ver' much to cover his death. He was ver' brave man. He was loyal. I could forgive the money if they had left him alive."

"Th' Rocky Mountains is a small place. We'll meet up with 'em," optimistically promised Joe. "Now that we're up we

might as well eat a snack, bury poor Slim an' stretch out early for Cherry Crick."

CHAPTER VII

NATCHEZ GETS ACQUAINTED

THE wagons reached Cherry Creek after a half-day haul. They halted only long enough to water the mules in the scattered pools in the bed of the stream and to permit an hour of grazing. Then the journey was resumed down the bank with the dust and sand making the travel very disagreeable.

Late afternoon found the train at the foot of a ridge where grew a few cottonwoods and where cold springs bubbled. California Joe informed the party that beyond the ridge was the town of Denver. The mules were turned out to graze and the fire for the evening meal was lighted.

While the men were thus employed several parties of prospectors passed the camp, eager to make the new settlement. One miner, a lank Georgian, halted for a few minutes and advised Laramie Pete to rush his goods to town without delay and reap a harvest. Laramie thanked him and explained that his animals needed rest but that he should finish his journey on the morrow.

"Don't pretend to be advising a man about his own business," said the Southerner, "but being new to this country you'd best look out for the Arapahoes and a few white men whose hands never swung a pick."

"Injuns troublesome, partner?" asked Joe.

"There's a thousand Arapahoes camped round Denver and Auraria. In different villages, of course, but near enough to each to join hands if they decided on mischief. They've behaved all right so far, but some of the men have abused them, and they won't stand much more without hitting back.

"We fellers that come here first got along all right with them. Now they're scared for their lands after seeing others pile in. When the real rush comes there'll be trouble. Just now they're feeling ugly at what the chaps over in Hell-on-Wheels have been doing to them. Once they start fighting they won't stop to learn who's friendly and who's crooked, but take hair as they come to it.

"Then there's a highwayman who's been operating recently. Boys call him Half-Mask on account of the black mask that covers his eyes and nose only."

"Hell-on-Wheels," repeated Natchez, his mobile face lighting up. "That sounds mighty interesting. Where is it? What is it?"

"Small colony three miles from Denver over Clear Creek way. Half a dozen wagons turned into lodgings and filled with some tough customers. Work hard at mining, but rough by natur'. They've shot up several Indians.

"So long. See you all tomorrow. My name's Martin—Stubby Martin. Anything I can do, call on."

Miss June retired at sundown, weary from the day's hardships. The men smoked in silence about the fire, each wondering what lay ahead of them beyond the ridge.

Laramie and Natchez, in common with the trappers, speculated on their chances of meeting Red Shirley. The trappers, as a separate source of thought, wondered if Old Oakes and his mad Indian were in or near Denver. The community that lived in wagons would be a likely place for him to establish his headquarters.

It was still early in the evening when Natchez rose and announced:

"Reckon I'll climb up the ridge and see what it looks like on t'other side. Any one want to go along?"

"I must stay here with *ma fille*," replied Laramie. "Better turn in and get an early start in the morning."

"We're too lazy, Tom 'n' me," added Joe. "Say, younker, it's longer to the top o' that ridge then it looks. Better wait till sun-up."

Natchez laughed in derision and strode from the camp, calling back that he could not sleep and that the walk would do him good. He covered the ground rapidly, but the ridge retreated as he advanced. He began to wish he had remained in camp; but to return and confess that he had been deceived in estimating the distance went against his proud spirit. So he doggedly kept on until he stood on the ridge.

Down below twinkled a few lights where Denver and its rival, Auraria, stood with the dry bed of Cherry Creek between them. A half-circle of mountains formed the background, and from the infant settlements one could soon lose himself in any one of half a dozen cañons.

The lights spelled fellowship, and Natchez was filled with a great desire to visit them. He did not believe it would require many minutes to make the distance, and it would be rather fine to saunter into camp and announce he had been inspecting the new town. Proceeding on an impulse, which often governed his actions, he set off down the slope.

Twilight was thickening into gloom, and what he could see of the country appeared to be a treeless, barren waste, a desolation that the howls of wolves and the steel-blue evening sky served to accentuate.

His descent to the town was much shorter than the climb up the ridge from the wagons. On approaching the outskirts of the town, he was surprized at the many Arapahoes he observed. He was continually passing small camps of them, and once he found it necessary to thread his way through a large village to avoid making a wide détour.

At last he was in Denver proper, and across the dry creek stood the straggling settlement of Auraria. As several miners had erected their huts and hovels in the very bed of the stream it was natural for a stranger to think of the two little towns as forming one.

Natchez was gregarious by nature. He loved crowds and action. Only the lure of Miss June La Blanche, whom he had first met in St. Louis while she was attending school, could have decoyed him away from the big river that washed the town of Natchez-under-the-Hill.

He was groomed for companionship with rough men and manners. If he reflected the more open vices of his time he also retained something fine of heart, a heritage from his little Creole mother. By blood and destiny he was an adventurer; and the calling in fifty-eight necessitated an extensive acquaintance with Adventure's handmaidens—quick shooting and effective knife-play.

Young and irrepressible as he was, these straggling lights from torch, camp-fire and battered lanterns, the medley of rough voices, these bearded and belted men in stoggy cowhide boots and flannel shirts, all appealed to him as something to be highly relished. The monotony of plains travel had depressed him. Now he was all exhilaration and elation.

He forgot the wagon-train and the possible anxiety his friends might experience at his disappearance. He had youth and he had gold; he had courage and a cunning that permitted him to disdain biased odds. He was eager to exchange some of his riches for the thrill of contact.

Nor did his coming fail to contribute something to the scene. Among men who labored in narrow, dark gulches and came to town bespattered with mud, his clean buckskin garments, his dandy's neck-scarf and exquisitely embroidered moccasins, set him apart from the gaunt-framed Southerners and the hawk-faced Northern men.

The elegance of his dress was subordinate, however, to the charm of his slim figure and handsome face. Those who looked closely might discover the panther beneath the gay attire and lively manner.

In the smoky light he would impress the many as being a genial young man searching for a good time; possibly a vain and foolish young man with a mind never above his personal appearance. All would expect him to have gold on his person with which to gamble and buy Taos lightning.

AT FIRST Natchez was contented to wander about and obtain a general idea of the town and its denizens. The sight of a dozen Cherokees made him think of home, where he had seen many of them. They were well set-up men, quiet and observing, and of a higher type than any plains Indians he had seen. Nor did the miners curse them out as they would an Arapaho when he got in the way.

Having made the rounds, Natchez settled down to enjoying the camp by piecemeal. As a beginning for leisurely details he stopped before an open shed, made of cottonwood branches, and for four bits bought a tin dipper brimming over with the Taos distillate. The fiery fluid strangled him, and he flushed with resentment when a man laughed at him.

Calling for another dipperful, he tossed it off without blinking; then turned and stared steadily at the man who had laughed. But the latter would not find a challenge in the steady gaze; rather, he thought the newcomer was bidding for approval.

"Guess you got the notion of it," he granted.

"——! A —— Northerner!" snapped Natchez.

The other laughed good-naturedly and

invited him to drink. This offer took the edge from Natchez' resentment, but mother wit was warning him he had had enough of the potent lightning for the time being.

"No, thanks," he curtly refused, still unable to forgive the laugh although anxious to become acquainted with some one and enjoy the privilege of unburdening himself of questions.

Near the drinking-place was another and larger structure, open in front and made of branches and brushwood. Extending nearly across this was a counter formed of rough slabs and filled in in front with cottonwood logs, making a good defense if the proprietor were assailed by his patrons.

A man with snow-white hair sat behind the counter in a chair fashioned from a hogshead. On a shelf below the counter were two "Crimea" revolvers, so called for being a popular arm among the British in the Crimean War and now trickling into the new world as the restless in spirit sought to replace the horrors of Sebastopol with the thrills of the American frontier. The weapons, built on the Adams patent and throwing a forty-caliber conical bullet through the six-and-a-half-inch barrel, were not in view of the gamesters, but all knew they were there and that the hands so dextrously dealing the cards were equally proficient in handling hardware.

Squatting on the ground beside the proprietor was an Indian who paid no attention to the jostling players. He was absorbed in cutting notches in a stick. Newcomers at first set the Indian down as a tally-keeper for the white man, but soon realized that this was not so, for no sooner did he cut five notches than he shaved them off. Easterners pronounced him a half-wit. Old frontiersmen solemnly declared he was the gambler's luck. The proprietor always extended the cards for his strange companion to cut, it was to be noticed.

Natchez halted before this booth and studied the rough-garbed men while waiting for the Taos lightning slightly to decrease the power of its kick. Half a dozen men were ranged up at the table playing faro with no particular zest. Their attitude was that of men waiting for something. The dealer, dealing out of his hand instead of a box, also lifted his head occasionally and shot a sharp glance at the group under the torches out front, just as if he too were waiting for something to happen, or for some one to come.

Natchez shifted his attention to his immediate neighbors and became interested in their gossip, thinking to get a line on some of the latest strikes.

"Don't believe Denham will come. Always gits here before this time."

"How long since he was here?"

"Ten days. Time enough for him to have filled up his sack. Mebbe they got him."

"He ain't called 'Lucky' Denham for nothing. They'll never git him. Even th' Half-Mask can't pull that trick."

"If he does he'll have to be luckier'n we've been. He gits out of sight like he was a ghost. One thing's sure. It 's free gold such as we use to git in old California. There ain't 'nother man in these mountains that's gittin' free gold."

Others chimed in, turning the dialog into a symposium on crime. Natchez listened to various deeds of outlawry and almost felt contempt for the men.

Obviously the majority of them were formerly small farmers or mechanics. They were there to get gold and return home and live in ease and peace. Crime was abhorrent to such, and the criminal, according to their gossip, was usually immune from punishment. This feeling of helplessness would easily work them up to a frenzy, when there would come vigilantes, mob hangings, the blind blood-madness sending the innocent with the guilty to the noose.

In Natchez' broad, wholesome code the only way to eliminate crime was calmly to track down the criminal and shoot him. The aspect of a community remaining passive until accumulated evils suddenly stung it into incoherent action disgusted him. He had seen other outlying centers huddle together like sheep while Death stalked arm in arm with some desperado, then react with a violence that took the innocent along with the guilty. As individuals there were few, Natchez believed, who would buoyantly take the trail of the marauder and follow it until the nuisance was abated.

"Brant Birly heard him speak when the Clear Crick men was held up," loudly declared one of the miners. "Brant's hands was up mighty high, but he run th' risk of bein' potted by askin' a question. Brant says th' minute Half-Mask opened his

mouth he knew he was a Northerner."

"You'll be claiming next he's an Abolitionist," sneered the New England man who had invited Natchez to drink. "Now I don't give a Bunker Hill bean for what Brant Birly says. Frank Seely here lay within twenty feet of Half-Mask when he 'n' three of his men rode away from the Platte Cañon hold-up. Frank'll tell how he'd been asleep and the hosses woke him. He heard them talking, and he'll swear on a heap of Bibles as tall as Pike's Peak that Half-Mask is a Southern man."

"Thash so," Seely affirmed, his eyes rolling with drunken gravity.

Natchez gleefully gave room for the two to have it out with fists or weapons, as would have happened in his home town under the hill. The prospects of fun were spoiled by the deep bass voice of a big, good-natured man.

"Boys, don't get to quarreling," he began, speaking much as a father might caution obstreperous children. "If this Half-Mask knew we were fighting among ourselves on the question of his identity it would amuse him more than a ton of gold.

"Let's not have any North-and-South clashing here. We don't belong above or below Mason and Dixon's line. We belong to the West. We're all citizens of the West. We're Westerners and brothers, and we're of one mind when it comes to Half-Mask. We can't identify him by listening to his voice; he can change it. But he can't change the color of his hair——"

"It's black. Brant Birly says so."

"Sorter yaller—almost white," corrected Seely.

"Then there is the color of his eyes, if they can be seen through the eyeholes."

"Light blue," declared Seely.

"Black's coal," insisted Brant Birly's friend.

"I reckon you'll be as far apart when it comes to his height," remarked the pacificator in mingled disgust and amusement.

"We're all together for Parson Kitts," said the New England man.

Kitts smiled broadly.

"Which being the verdict, suppose we licker," he invited.

As he turned toward the drinking-place he caught Natchez' admiring eye and beckoned for him to be one of the party. Natchez decided he liked Kitts immensely. Falling in beside the New England man, he whispered, "Does the Parson preach?"

"Scarcely. We give him that handle because he's so soft-spoken and has such a flow of language. If it wasn't for him ther'd be fur flying round these diggings any day. Too much sectional spirit been brought out here. The Southern men are yapping that the North's trying to put through a railroad to the Pacific at the expense of the South, just to open up free States. Well, where would a road be built except along or above the forty-second or third parallels? Not to open up free States, but because that's where the road ought to run."

"And of course the country opened up wouldn't be free States," coldly remarked Natchez.

"Stepping on your toes, eh?" genially said the Northerner. "My name's Durgin. Hail from Vermont. I can see you're from the South. So let's quit it and licker in peace. The Parson's right. No good chewing over them things out here. When we get bigger and more settled we can have our town-meetings——"

"Oh, —— your town-meetings!" growled Natchez.

"Well, the Lord is all-powerful," readily conceded Durgin. "And here we are, ready to test the authority of Taos lightning."

THE liquor-vendor set out his dozen tin dippers, and the men took turns in drinking. In the confusion Natchez escaped drinking unnoticed, but Durgin poured down his portion as if it had been the sweetest spring water and expressed his preference for hard cider. Various discussions were commenced, and as the men disintegrated into twos and threes Natchez found himself beside Parson Kitts.

They exchanged names and Natchez said:

"I heard the talk in front of the gambling-place. Who is this Half-Mask anyway?"

Kitts fastened a cool, appraising gaze on Natchez' flushed face and confidentially informed him:

"According to Brant Birly's description he might be you, so far as hair and eyes go. Rather a silly question to ask if you heard how two men who have seen him at close range can't agree on the color of his hair."

Natchez was confused. It was seldom he lowered his gaze, but now he felt very youthful and callow.

"It was a fool question," he admitted. "But how long has he been working these parts?"

"About two weeks, I should say. You'd think some one might get a line on his face, seeing that he wears only a narrow mask. But no one seems to know whether he has a big or little chin, high or low forehead. Who are you anyway? Where did you come from? When did you get here?"

The voice was pitched low, but now was very stern.

Natchez did not resent the queries. He knew he might be under suspicion, being a stranger; and he briefly replied:

"From St. Joe. With Laramie Pete's wagons. He's camped over the ridge. Pulled in this afternoon. I came on ahead to size up the town.

"If Laramie Pete, California Joe and Tom Reason are any good as witnesses, I'm all right. If they 're doubted then there is June La Blanche, the daughter of Laramie. She will say I've been with the train every minute since we pulled out and until this afternoon. If any one doubts her he'll look down my gun."

"California Joe and Tom Reason are enough. I never met them, but I know they're all right. I don't know Laramie Pete, but I'm positive his daughter is the best alibi a man could have. If any one bothers you before your friends pull in just say that Kitts will vouch for you."

"That's mighty good of you. Shall we all licker?"

"Why, yes; but I don't think you need any more unless you're thinking of climbing Pike's Peak before breakfast."

Kitts' attention brought Natchez intimately to the attention of the men. He had been surreptitiously sized up from the moment he entered the little settlement. Now he was inventoried openly. Kitts explained who he was and finished by saying he would be his sponsor. This time Natchez did not dodge the liquor, but downed a dipperful without any outward flinching.

The accumulated effect of his potations inclined him for excitement. He carried himself with a bit of a swagger. His bold dark eyes were overbright, and he gave back glance for glance, whether the man be lank Southerner or thin-faced Yankee.

The conversation became general and ranged around three points—the latest gold strikes, the larcenous activities of the outlaw Half-Mask and the possibility of a transcontinental railroad. The last was rich as an incentive to ridicule. Regardless of their geographical bias all could unite in making game of such a gigantic undertaking, and many did so.

A few risked much rough banter by insisting that the road would be built. They cited the various surveys made at the order of Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War.

But once when for the sake of argument it was conceded that the road would be built the conversation became a powder-mine. No more joking then. No true son of the South would listen to the suggestion that the ocean-to-ocean road should run north of the slave States; and every loyal Northerner was as rabid against the line being built below Forty, except that it might dip south to strike through Kansas. Twice during the return to the gambling-shed did Kitts' voice avert trouble.

Natchez' blood was tingling and the gold burned in his belt. He told Durgin he must have action for his money. The Vermont man made a face at the announcement.

"What do you mean by that monkey grin?" truculently demanded Natchez, rather eager to find himself affronted.

"Just thinking of Lucky Denham," glibly replied Durgin to avoid trouble. "He comes here reg'lar and bucks the bank and goes back broke."

"Nothing very funny nor lucky in that," decided Natchez, scowling a rebuke.

"Mebbe not. But he's got a secret pot hid somewheres. Always brings plenty of dust. Blows it in, laughs at his losses and goes away saying he has plenty more. You oughter see him.

"The game's been waiting for him tonight. He's two nights overdue. Probably took a long roundabout way so the boys couldn't tumble to where he comes from. We've tried to follow him, but, land sakes, you might as well chase a weasel.

"That's why the men are sticking around. When he plays we keep off his bets and some of us is sure to make quite a little killing. He always loses."

"We'll see if my luck ain't better," remarked Natchez, elbowing his way into the shed until he stood before the rough counter.

The sallow face of the gambler remained

oblivious to his presence. The spectacle of the Indian feverishly cutting notches and slicing them off made Natchez forget for a moment the purpose of his visit.

"If you're only sight-seeing please step aside so the gentlemen can get their money down," murmured the dealer without lifting his blue eyes.

As he spoke he shuffled the cards, cut them and held them in his palm.

"I'll be cussed!" exploded Natchez. "Dealing out of his hand instead of using a box!"

"You don't admire my game?" politely asked Oakes, resting his hands in his lap and on a level with the concealed shelf containing the two revolvers.

"Sure I do! So much so I'm going to break it!" boastfully cried Natchez, pulling off his money-belt and stacking up some gold coins.

The crowd drew nearer, eager to see if he were to prove another Denham or if he was to have a fool's run of luck. They would either keep off his bets or duplicate them.

Oakes gave him a sharp glance, his superstitions alive to the danger of reckless wagers made by a man unbalanced by Taos lightning. He had small liking for the plunger who would bet his all on a turn of the card. The bank's chances were so overwhelming that he preferred the leisurely extermination of an adversary.

This less spectacular course was much better for the game. For although the persistent player was bound to lose there would be times when he would be ahead.

This was good advertising. More than one cautious fellow had watched Oakes' game and had refused to play until he had seen a man idiotically refusing to cash in while a goodly sum ahead. Then to demonstrate to the weak-minded how simple it was to beat the game if one would only stop when ahead the cautious man would take his first stack of chips and play—with the usual result.

And luck does sometimes perch on the shoulder of the fool, and freak wagers sometimes do sweep the board. In such contingencies Oakes depended on legerdemain to shape the finish to his liking and profit. Thus to meddle with the pranks of fortune was dangerous, and he never resorted to it except as a last defense.

OAKES extended the cards for the Pit River Indian to cut. The Indian did not seem to understand, although this ceremony was gone through every time the cards were run off. Oakes thrust the cards under the man's nose and hissed a word. The red man stared blankly, then understood and cut them.

Natchez watched the performance with an insolent grin on his daredevil face, and reached out for his cut. Oakes unhesitatingly placed them before him. Natchez cut with a flourish. The gambler picked them up and with one hand shifted the cut so dexterously that no human eye could follow the movement.

Natchez bet twenty dollars twice and lost; then wagered fifty and won. "Luck's with me!" he cried, pushing forward all his gold.

The card came up; the gambler nonchalantly reached out to rake in the stake, and Natchez went for his two guns, shouting—

"Cheat!"

Oakes fell forward under the counter, gathering up his weapons as he fell, and began shooting upward through the slabs while Natchez danced back and wasted lead on the front of logs. The crowd with the exception of two men who stood at the side of the shack rushed frantically into the outside darkness. These two pulled their guns, but Natchez swung his right and brought one down with a hole in his hip, and almost simultaneously fired with his left, hitting the second man in the shoulder and twirling him about.

Oaths and raucous calls from the mob outside, howls and curses from the two wounded men, suggested to Natchez that it was well for him to withdraw from the lantern-light. Before he could gain what went by the name of a street a piercing whistle sounded beneath the counter and four men tore through the brush back of the shelter, firing as they came.

Natchez dropped behind the breastwork of logs at the first sign of this new danger; but he would have been done for had not Kitts rushed on the scene, his guns half-raised, his eyes blazing through the acrid powder-smoke. The four men ceased firing and gave ground.

Natchez leaped to his feet and made to shoot, but Kitts yanked him about until he faced the opening and then ran a long arm inside his two arms and across the small of

his back, and thus held him a prisoner with his back to the enemy. Natchez still had his guns, but with his arms drawn far back he could only fire from the hip, and as he still faced the street there was nothing for him to fire at unless it be some of the spectators. Standing between him and the four newcomers, Kitts held his gun ready and called out:

"Show yourself, Oakes. If any of your friends chip into this game again I'll drill you and them."

"They didn't shoot to hurt," growled Oakes, crawling from under the counter and resuming his chair. "The cub's plugged two of my friends already. Told me I cheated! —— his eyes, Kitts, I'll have his blood for that."

"There must be no more shooting here tonight. Auraria already is hoping we've killed each other off."

"Let me go! I'll kill him!" furiously cried Natchez.

"Shut up, you fool," growled Kitts. "You've done enough mischief. Another word from you and out of the camp you go for good. And about two words will bring something more serious to you. You young idiot, you soak up Taos lightning, then come in here and after losing a few bets accuse this man of running a crooked game. We want no more of it."

"I saw him shift the cards——"

A harsh laugh from Kitts and a roar of derision from the onlookers smothered the rest.

"You poor simpleton," mercilessly continued Kitts, "do you suppose there is any man alive who can see him shift the cards when he really wants to shift them?"

Even the gambler relaxed into a grim smile at this compliment.

"Let the young man take his gold and get out, Parson. He isn't used to our style," said Oakes.

Then to the crowd:

"What say, boys? Game level, or crooked?"

"It's as level as faro can be level," grunted Durgin.

A chorus of similar sentiment followed this endorsement. Kitts released Natchez, who thrust his guns into his belt and stalked toward the street.

"You've forgotten your money," Oakes called after him, throwing some gold on the counter.

Natchez swung about on his heel, and for a second the spectators believed he was going after his guns again. Instead he quietly directed:

"Split it between those two tools of yours. It'll pay for patching them up."

This unique distribution of wealth caused the crowd to veer about in their sympathy and to cheer loudly. Evidently Parson Kitts found humor in it; for he thrust out his hand to Natchez and said:

"It's all right, younker. You made something of a mistake, but you've done much to patch it up. Oakes runs a straight game or he'd been hung before this. Let's licker up and forget it."

With a hearty huzza of approval the men turned and made for the liquor-shed. Oakes reloaded his weapons with great care. The Indian mumbled in his native tongue and continued notching his stick. Natchez walked beside Kitts behind the group.

"Who were the four who came through the side of the shack?" he asked.

"Oakes' backers. Hires them to be on deck if the Auraria crowd comes over and acts rough. Tough chaps, but not really bad. Stay over at Hell-on-Wheels."

"One calls himself Red Shirley, doesn't he?"

"Possibly. It isn't polite to ask a man just what he does call himself. He usually tells it without being asked. What about him?"

"Oh, nothing."

Natchez, while recognizing Shirley, did not believe the former wagon-boss had recognized him. When the four came through the brush wall Natchez dropped to the ground, and when he regained his feet it was only to have Kitts whirl him around, back to the gambler's body-guard.

His first thought was to acquaint Kitts with the theft from the wagon-train, but second thought decided him to wait and let Laramie Pete take action. His impulses already had got him into serious trouble, and but for Kitts' intervention he believed he would have been killed.

"You knew one of them as Red Shirley?" asked Kitts.

"I knew a man once by that name. One of the four looked like him. I'll pass up this round, I reckon, and be starting back to the train."

"It might be wise," Kitts dryly approved.

They were now crowding about the entrance of the shed, but before the liquor could be served they heard the voice of a man shouting. All eyes were turned toward the mountains whence came the sound, and soon the clatter of flying feet indicated the great haste of the fellow.

"Don't lose your wind. It's the Parson's treat," bawled one of the roisterers.

"Denham! Lucky Denham!" exclaimed the newcomer, now breaking into the dancing light cast by the torches and few lanterns.

"Hooray! Here's Rogers with the welcome word that Lucky Denham's coming to bust the bank! Where'd you see him, Rogers? How long before he'll get here? Bet he's got another sack filled with gold," cheered Durgin, waving his battered hat wildly. "High jinks in this town tonight if he has."

"Denham's dead!" panted Rogers as he burst from the darkness into the light.

"DEAD?" dully repeated Kitts, setting down his dipper. "Are you trying to be funny, Rogers?"

"Not 'less finding a dead man's funny," puffed Rogers, grabbing up Kitts' drink and tossing it off. "I've run three miles. Bandy Benton's staying by the body. Him and me found it. Body's riddled."

"Robbed, of course," muttered Kitts.

The others seemed to have lost their power of speech.

"He had nothing on him. He never comes to camp without dust. Yes, he must have been robbed."

The crowd stirred uneasily. Kitts spoke for all when he said:

"It's got to be stopped. Half-Mask must go. We must organize. How long ago was Denham killed?"

"Bandy says within twenty-four hours. He used to be a hoss-doctor or something in the States, and he claims he can tell."

Kitts turned away from the low counter and announced:

"Boys, I ain't got the heart to be drinking while poor Denham lies out there dead. I'll take a couple men and go out and bring the body in. Tomorrow we'll make a few plans and see if we can't stretch a few ropes."

"Gang's probably making headquarters at Hell-on-Wheels," suggested Rogers.

"I don't think so," said Durgin. "I was out there a week and the men were all busy with their gulch mining. They're rather rough, but they ain't up to that kind of work. This robbing and killing business didn't begin till this —— Half-Mask blew in. I guess he and his gang hide up in some of the cañons. And I guess his gang is a mighty small one."

"I'll bet they're Mormons," said Seely.

"Whoever they are, Lucky's death spoils all chances of our ever finding Lucky's secret gold-mine," reminded Kitts. "So we owe them for that as well as for Lucky's death."

He had spoken the thought now racing through every man's mind. Denham had come from his secret treasure-house for the last time. In the past he had arrived from every point of the compass, and had made his return a most fascinating game. Each time he left the town minus his gold the miners had attempted to trail him. While he was carousing in town men were sent out in all directions to hide and watch for him to pass them. All these efforts had been useless.

Some of the men once hired an Arapaho to dog his trail. The Indian was found shot through the head, all of which was voted to be an excellent bit of humor on Denham's part.

His brutal taking off therefore not only brought stern civic resentment, but also a sense of great financial loss. So long as Denham lived and continued his visits to town there was always a chance of some one discovering his hidden diggings. Once that was accomplished there would be an exodus which would leave Denver empty. Now he was dead each man in the community considered himself to have been robbed of a fortune.

Natchez hazarded the suggestion that Denham's slayers had learned the secret. The miners scoffed at the idea. Denham was killed while on his way to town with a bag of dust. He was shot down for what was on his person—a pitiable retail brand of thieving when compared with the magnificent stakes to be won by successful tracking.

Rogers now amended his original report to include the significant fact that the dead man's weapons were found in his belt, loaded. This proved he was attacked from behind and taken completely unaware.

"Didn't even have a chance to draw a gun!" sorrowfully commented Durgin.

"Unless the man who held him up was

some one he knew and would never suspect," said Natchez.

"Ye seem mighty keen to prove it wa'n't no stranger to him that done the job," gruffly declared a heavily bearded fellow. "It happens that ye're a stranger to him an' to us. Happens ye had gold aplenty when ye come here tonight. Happens ye're mighty quick to pull a gun. Reckon it would be good business to prospect ye for a trifle."

Inclined to find a suspect in any stranger, the men focused their gaze on Natchez. Only Durgin and Kitts retained a friendly attitude. The latter turned to the speaker and said:

"None of that, Mason. This young man arrived from beyond the ridge this afternoon. Came with Laramie Pete, a trader. California Joe is in the party. It's all right to ask about any man we don't know, but let's not be too hasty in forming opinions. And the gold this man threw away was in coins, not dust."

"If he travels with Californy Joe he must be all right. I know 'bout Joe. Sorry I barked up th' wrong tree," gruffly apologized Mason.

Natchez, now sobered, quietly announced:

"I'm returning to the wagon-train tonight so my friends won't be worried. None of you know that I came with Laramie Pete except that I say so. If any of you gentlemen wish to go along with me to make sure I told Kitts the truth I'll be glad to have you. I'm just as keen to find and help hang this fellow you call Half-Mask as any of you."

"I'm satisfied you're all right," said Kitts. "But I'm not running this town. There's no proof of what you say except your word. If the others would feel easier to have some of the boys go with you, I'd say Durgin and Mason would be the right men."

The majority of the men were now satisfied that Natchez was what he appeared to be, a hot-headed young man lacking in balance. Yet there were those who desired to prove him up beyond any doubt.

"Either he should stay here till his friends pull in and vouch for him, or some one oughter go with him," said Rogers.

"I'll go," agreed Durgin. "All nonsense, but it won't do any harm."

"Glad of your company, gentlemen; that is, if Mr. Mason will come also," said Natchez. "And we have a wagon filled with real whisky and you shall sample it."

"I'd admire to go!" warmly exclaimed Mason.

CHAPTER VIII

ELUSIVE GOLD

LARAMIE PETE'S calling led him only where men had gone before who would be in need of his wares. He had no desire to blaze new trails, nor did his soul find peace in gazing on new scenes, nor in being the first to make a path through untrodden wastes and fastnesses. The most majestic heights interested him not at all unless there should be a settlement at their base.

This was his first intimate association with the mother range of the Rockies; and after he had arranged his wagons in a permanent camp near the sand-hills east of Denver, and between that town and a large village of Arapaho Indians, the towering triumphs of Nature made no impression on him. While his companions gazed in awe at the magnificent mob of peaks crowding one another as they peered down on the white pigmies toiling in cañon and gulch, the trader's thoughts were filled with estimates of possible profits.

The wagons were arranged in a square with entrance to the inclosure forbidden except to the trader, his daughter, Natchez, Old Missouri and the two trappers. The covering of the wagon facing the town was raised and a rude counter set up that extended several feet from the side and reached from wheel to wheel. On this and behind it were stacked goods. Miss June was to preside over this unique store, with Natchez as her eager assistant during rush hours.

Taking the sides of another wagon and a bale of canvas, Laramie selected a site near some cottonwoods at the mouth of Cherry Creek and built a substantial bar. The canvas was hung over this like a huge awning or a tent without sides. Here Old Missouri would sleep and help with the liquor trade.

In the eyes of men accustomed to poisoning themselves with Taos lightning under a shack of brushwood the effect was gorgeous. The canvas was weather-tight; it extended to the shade of the cottonwoods. There was a great abundance of tin dippers. No man need wait for his neighbor to drink.

The whisky, too, was a vast improvement on the Taos product.

The belief that the liquor was thoroughly innocuous, or as California Joe expressed it "lacked authority," was largely engendered by the calm and unruffled appearance of Durgin, who had accompanied the train to town, and who boasted of having sampled the stock very vigorously. This skepticism was somewhat allayed by the belated arrival of Mason, who could remember nothing of what had happened after his first onslaught on the trader's hospitality.

Trade at the wagons became very brisk, with the Arapahoes proving to be a nuisance because of their persistence in seeking entrance behind the wagons. In town Laramie Pete and Old Missouri, indifferently aided by the trappers, did a rushing business in liquids. The dealer in Taos lightning glumly watched his chances of easy fortune go a-glimmering as the more mellow article sold under the canvas established its ascendancy.

Neither of the trappers was intended for commercial pursuits; and after a brief and bungling endeavor to promote Pete's prosperity they jumped over the bar, informed those who insisted on being served where they could go to, and made a lazy tour of the town. While they were not fastidious in dress the muddy appearance of the miners displeased them. Not because it was mud but because it was a badge of servitude. A man bowed double under a load of gold would have registered the same effect.

Old Oakes would not open his game until night, and as Natchez had glossed over his experience and had failed to mention the gambler by name the trappers had no intimation that the man was in that vicinity.

As the two returned to the wagons Joe glanced at Reason's solemn face and said: "Don't blame ye. Queer how a parcel o' men can spile a place by clutterin' it up with shovels an' picks. We'll be leavin' here mighty soon."

Now came Parson Kitts to the wagons, quite resplendent in clean and freshly greased boots. Natchez presented him. He shook hands with the men in a very hearty manner, bowed low before Miss June and eagerly assured her of his desire to be of service at any time. He was a masterful man; the girl was flattered, and Natchez inclined to be jealous. His visit was brief, however, as he declared that he must be about earning his living.

The men walked a bit with him and met Laramie. The trader was introduced to Kitts by Natchez, who took the opportunity to remark—with a meaning glance at Laramie—that the Parson was the leader in the new settlement.

"Hardly that, my young friend," laughed Kitts. "The boys are good fellows and sometimes are good enough to listen to me. I'm older than most of them. That's all."

"*M'sieu* is ver' polite. But he is ver' big man here. He is like *un bourgeois*. My young friend here tells me he saw a man here last night who stole ten thousand dollars from me after killing one of my men."

"Stole ten thousand dollars!" cried Kitts. "Who is he?"

"When he was with the wagon-train he was known as Red Shirley," said Natchez. "He was one of the four men who came through the brush wall of the gambling-place when the dealer whistled for help."

"I know him. He still calls himself Red Shirley," said Kitts, pursing his lips and frowning thoughtfully. "Of course this camp isn't made up entirely of saints. Some tough ones in every new camp. We never ask what a man did before he came here. We keep watch only on what he does while here. It would be rather an ugly mess to accuse him of stealing the gold, let alone trying to make him confess and give it back."

"What ye want to bother Mr. Kitts with such stuff for?" impatiently asked California Joe. "Me 'n' Tom was plannin' to drop in on him afore night an' have him fetch th' money back."

"Not so fast, California," warned Kitts. "We're trying to keep this town decent. We don't want to fall back on any vigilante work. We object to any one settling his troubles in his own way. We object all the more if he's a new man. I don't hold any office in this town, and what influence I have is due entirely to my always telling the boys we must work for the welfare of the town. We have some fighting and shooting, of course, but we try to keep it down.

"Your friend says he's been robbed by Red Shirley. I believe him. But Shirley got here first and has made friends. Some men came with him who'll stand behind him.

"If you go after the money rough and

tumble somebody is going to get killed. Perhaps you'd get the money back, and perhaps you wouldn't. I'd advise a quiet talk and an offer to compromise—split the money."

"It is all mine!" expostulated Laramie Pete.

"Every derned piece of it!" cried Joe.

"Of course it is," soothed Kitts. "But look at it this way: You can't afford to get the boys down on you by coming in here and starting a fight that'll cost several lives. Even if they hoorayed and went with you they'd feel mad after it's all over. They'd begin to think it would 'a' been a mighty good plan for you to take care of your money so it couldn't be stolen. Then again probably the money has been divided—some of it spent on gambling and drink.

"Now I'm willing to do this: I'll go with Laramie alone and talk it over with Red Shirley. If he has any of the money I believe I can get him to fork over part of it. But he won't give a cent back unless he knows the whole affair is to end with what he does hand back. I'll speak to Old Oakes about it when he opens his game tonight. Shirley seems to be his man, and——"

"Old Oakes!" snarled California Joe, his black beard bristling. "If I ain't got a stick in pickle for that feller! Where does he hang out? I'll l'arn how strong his medicine is when it bucks ag'in' mine!"

KITTS stared at the trapper in surprize, then shook his head despondently, and in deep disgust demanded:

"Just how many feuds have you people fetched to this town? Oakes came here and opened a faro game. Ain't been here long, but he's an old-timer beside you fellows.

"He seems to be on the square. His game is about the only amusement the boys have. It would be mighty unpopular for strangers to bring any fight to him here."

"It'll be all over before any one knows it's started," growled Reason.

"You're wrong, my friend," was the cold reply. "It won't start. I don't know what the trouble is between Oakes and you two, and I don't want to know. But I do know it ain't any dish for Denver to feed out of."

"Laramie Pete an' Natchez don't know nothin' 'bout it," admitted Joe.

"Then we'll tell Oakes it's peace so long as you all are in the town. What you do to each other after you quit town doesn't interest us. But no fighting here. We limit that to drunken rows—things no one can stop."

The trapper fingered his beard meditatively, his gaze meeting Kitts' stern eyes unflinchingly. Then with a whimsical grin he said:

"Ye speak reasonable. It's a personal fuss atween us, an' we've got all of creation to settle it in outside o' this town. If he'll agree to act perlite-like while we're here we'll let it go at that, trustin' to meet up with him later when we can take our time in tannin' his hide.

"But as certain words has been swapped atween us an' as he's sure to go for his guns when we visit his game tonight ye'd better pass word to him to hold his hosses; otherwise ye'll need a new faro-dealer."

"That's fine!" heartily declared Kitts. "I'll see him and tell him it's to be a truce. He'll be glad of it because he don't want to stop his game by being killed. It'll make it easier to fix up the Shirley matter."

With this understanding Kitts left them.

Reason explosively denounced any plans that forbade their settling their own affairs in their own way. Natchez would have endorsed his sentiments warmly had he not been placed under obligations to Kitts the night before. California Joe was inclined to accept the situation philosophically, remarking that there was no hurry, and that it would be "fine travelin' underground" for Oakes at a later day.

Laramie took the trader's viewpoint; he worshiped barter and profit. Gold must be served. Pete effectually silenced Reason by shrewdly reminding him:

"This town is all right for my little girl if no trouble starts. But if trouble comes it might be ver' bad for her. As M'sieu Joe says, so much room for fighting away from here. I know how *messieurs* feel. It is ver' noble of their hearts to avenge their wrongs. When young and there was no little girl I do the same."

"Ugh! Shut up!" growled Reason. "Who says I'd stir up a mess that would git th' gal into any fuss? Joe 'n' me will wait. I'll make him wait."

"*Merci!* I owe you many times for kindness. I will now take the little one to the Arapaho camp to meet the head men. Natchez, you go and stay with Missouri

in the tent. M'sieu Reason, will you be so kind as to go and watch the wagons?"

Reason grunted something uncomplimentary to storekeeping, but lost much of his displeasure as they came up to the wagons and Miss June warmed him with a smile. It was evident that her father had informed her of his plans, as she was ready to visit the Indian village.

As Joe and Laramie and the girl drew near the village the trapper halted and listened attentively to the sound of singing.

"They're yelpin' 'bout their medicine," he said. "They're startin', or finishin', war-dances."

"But not against the whites," Laramie assured them. "I sent a talk to Left Hand by a squaw this morning. He is friendly to the whites."

"Left Hand's all right. Let's find him."

The girl was in no way perturbed by the sights and sounds of the village. The Arapaho blood in her veins made her feel at home as she and the two men advanced between the outer circle of tents. The singing and dancing were going on in the center of the village.

The trader refrained from penetrating thither. He led the way to a large lodge and invited the girl and the trapper to make themselves comfortable. Their coming had been observed and Left Hand would soon join them, he explained.

They had barely seated themselves on robes before the singing ceased abruptly. In a few minutes the chief, Left Hand, friendly to the whites yet destined to die six years later by the white man's bullets in the Sand Creek massacre, entered the lodge and was shaking his guests by the hand. Next he produced a calumet and the three men smoked. After a brief silence the trader informed him—

"I come about my daughter."

The chief turned to her and said—

"They say there is Arapaho blood in your heart."

She bowed, to show she understood. He continued:

"It is very little Arapaho blood. It is washed almost white. But our people stand by their blood so long as it can speak to them."

Another pause while the chief stared vacantly over the girl's head; then the trader resumed:

"My white friends and I may be away from the wagons at times. I wish my daughter—the daughter of your people—to have some of your women to stay with her. I wish the Arapaho men to help her if any danger creeps near her."

"It has been said before. I say it again now. Her Arapaho blood, even if only as much as follows the scratch of a thorn, shall be heard when it speaks to the people of her mothers. Our women shall be with her and tell us if the men are needed."

He leaped to his feet and called out in a shrill, ear-piercing voice. At once warriors came running between the tents and grouped before the big lodge. Left Hand explained:

"This pale-faced woman has Arapaho blood. It is very little. All the rest is white blood. She lives with white people.

"She is afraid she may need help. She calls to us through the few drops of Arapaho blood to be her brothers.

"The Inunaina will hear the voice even if it speaks through but one drop of blood. We will help her when white men can not help her. We will forget that her father is a white man and only remember that her mother's mother's mother was an Arapaho of full blood. You will remember."

Then he called the leading men, a dozen of them, by name, and as each was called he advanced and clapped both hands on the girl's shoulders and after staring steadily into her eyes for a few moments stepped back a few paces, and, raising his right hand above his head, palm outward, cried, "*Hao!*" then fell back among his fellows. Twelve times this ceremony was repeated. Left Hand then turned to the girl and quietly said:

"Our eyes are open. We will be ready. Our women will be with you tomorrow."

Miss June touched first herself, then the chief, on the left breast, the sign for "Good Hearts," as the Arapahoes were fond of styling themselves, and then modestly stepped behind her father.

As the trader passed from the lodge he said—

"I heard war-singing and dancing."

Left Hand carelessly replied—

"Only the young men singing their buffalo songs."

"They say there is a war-path leading to the Utes," said Joe.

"The country is hard to travel. Why should red men fight red men?" evaded the chief.

"They say it would be very bad if the Arapahoes should be followed to this place by the Utes and should lose their women and children," continued the trapper.

"The white man talks like a fool. The Arapahoes follow no war-path. When they do, they come home singing and bringing scalps for their squaws to dance."

The chief turned from them and stalked back into the center of the village. California Joe insisted to Laramie:

"He's a liar. They're plannin' a fight ag'in' th' Utes. If th' Utes win they'll be pilin' in here, an' there'll be white sculps mixed with the red."

"If the Utes win it would be bad for my little girl," murmured Laramie.

THE remainder of the day passed quietly as the majority of the miners were busy seeking gold. Laramie kept busy with arranging his stock of goods. Natchez in a repentant mood for the previous night's folly kept close to the wagons, seeking a chance to make love to Miss June, who saw fit to ignore him until he was reduced—as California Joe phrased it—to a "ten-thousand-foot level."

Reason drew apart and smoked as he oiled the snakeskin. He had a vague belief that this attention would propitiate the efficiency of his medicine.

Two hours before sunset Kitts rode over to the wagons and informed Laramie:

"Oakes won't open his game tonight unless we convince him your friend is not bringing a fight to him. He knows about you people, and one of the boys says he won't come here so long as he thinks California Joe is gunning for him. If he doesn't show up his man Shirley won't come.

"You and me had better take his word that so long as he and Joe are in this town there will be no trouble between them. He has lots of influence with the Hell-on-Wheels crowd, and we can work on Shirley through him."

"You are ver' kind," cried Laramie, his eyes brightening at the prospect of recovering some of his stolen gold. "You say it is three miles. We will go. M'sieu Joe will send a peace-smoke by us."

Joe, standing by, grimaced, then caught a glimpse of the girl's happy face. She had compelled Natchez to sue for forgiveness and make innumerable promises.

"I never reckoned on havin' any truck with that feller 'cept over th' barrel of a gun," growled Joe. "Howsomever, if it's for th' good o' th' gal an' her paw I 'low I can't be low-down 'nough to bust up th' game.

"Go ahead, Mr. Kitts. I know ye won't put any mealy words into my mouth. Jest tell th' white-head that our guns stay in our belts so long as we're on Cherry Crick. An' if Red Shirley don't hand over th' most o' that coin Tom 'n' me will pay him a visit he'll never git over."

The trapper did not like the notion of the two men going alone, however, and insisted they were packing two few guns for their errand. Kitts patiently assured him there would be no trouble, but that a show of force could easily provoke a fight.

He further explained that while the men at Hell-on-Wheels were rough and fiery-tempered they were honest and hard-working. Appeal to their sense of justice without using threats and they would be very reasonable, he said. Tom Reason quieted his old friend's qualms by gravely informing him:

"This snake medicine shows up mighty strong for us. We're playin' our luck, or every one of 'em scales is a liar. It'll be settled very quiet-like. If I 'lowed there was any chance for fun I'd tag after 'em, Kitts or no Kitts."

While the two rode toward the little colony with the lurid name Kitts explained many things to Laramie. He dwelt at some length on the mystery surrounding the sudden coups made by Half-Mask, and this recital included the killing of Denham and the legend of the lost mine.

Gold dust was the magnet that could draw Laramie against any odds. His slim frame straightened and his luminous eyes flashed greedily.

"Such a man as you tell about couldn't or wouldn't do much gulch mining," he shrewdly observed. "He came to town and drank that miserable Taos stuff. His nerves were broken down when he went back to his gold. Then, *plop!* Behold! Before you know it he was in town again with more dust.

"I should say he has found a large cache of gold dust. He stayed away from town just long enough to get to his hidden gold and back again. Sometimes he went in a roundabout way, to throw the men off the track.

"You say he took a different trail each

time. Sometimes he led his trailers far beyond his cached gold, then slipped away from them. I believe, *m'sieu*, he planned to travel the last bit of his journey in the night when coming to town or making for his treasure. It was in the night that he was killed.

"What fools they were to kill him! A pouch or two of dust when they might have had a mine!"

"You and I think alike," said Kitts. "The fellow was a physical wreck. He never did any real mining. What do you say if we pull in double harness and see if we can't locate his hidden dust?"

"Done!" cried Laramie. "I would say the same to Natchez, who loves and will marry my daughter when we get back to St. Joseph, but he is too hot in the head. I would owe M'sieu Joe and his good friend a share in the business, but they are here today and gone tomorrow, and gold does not tempt them.

"You, M'sieu Kitts—if you will have the great politeness to permit me so to say—are a brain man. You think. You reason.

"It happens that Pete La Blanche—Laramie Pete—was never the fool. I will not work at digging gold. I am a trader. But I will trade my time and strength in hunting for gold that some one else has dug and which no one owns. It is so between us."

Their hands met with a smack to cement the new partnership.

This agreement tended to make them more confidential in their talk. Laramie Pete's admissions were those of the born trader. There was but one thing he loved above the game of barter—his daughter.

Kitts' story was most prosaic, if not relieved by certain broad ambitions. Ohio born, he had wandered much without encountering anything more interesting than hard luck and occasional spurts of prosperity.

But his soul possessed forces which inclined men to listen to him, to serve him. He had proved it many times in the various mining-camps. Given a fortune, he would return to the States and become a political power. As he confessed this much his head was held high and his eyes grew very masterful, as if he would stare Destiny out of countenance.

"But yes. Why not? It would be ver' simple for you, M'sieu Kitts," warmly agreed Laramie. "But for me, La Blanche, the trader, give me more trains! Give me trading-stations! One near Fort Bridger for the Oregon and Mormon trade. One in the Carson Valley. Surely one where Bent's old fort stood. Ah, such a spot is Bent's old fort for trade if the cursed railroads but keep away!

"My posts would grow into big depots. I would also have them on the Willamette, the Platte and the Missouri. So soon as a new trail was opened into the West—and more will be opened, for more gold will be found—my stores would spring up there. I would kill out all competition."

"Lucky we don't all want to do the same thing," whimsically remarked Kitts. "Now we're coming to the wagons, and you better ride behind and let me do the talking."

Half a dozen prairie schooners, supplemented with sections of rock walls, all arranged in a circle, formed the little settlement known as Hell-on-Wheels. Rocks were also piled about the wagons as high as their sides. The tops, weatherworn and much bedraggled, still served to keep out some of the storm. A portion of the inclosure had been roofed over with bark and brush.

A narrow opening, facing the east, was the only point of ingress. Toward this Kitts rode, but did not enter. Reining in his horse, he lustily called out:

"Old Oakes! Come out here. Kitts is calling."

TWO men emerged from under the brush shelter. One of them was the gambler, the other being the Pit River Indian. Oakes clambered up the side of a stone wall between two wagons and made sure of Kitts' identity, then hastened from the inclosure.

He nodded to Kitts a surly greeting, flashed a glance at Laramie Pete, and waited to learn the meaning of the visit. Kitts began by saying—

"California Joe and his friend are back in town."

Oakes' eyes narrowed, and he laconically replied—

"I know it."

Kitts went on:

"I've been talking with him. I've told him we won't have any old quarrels settled in town. He has agreed to a truce while there. I come to learn if you will smoke."

Oakes hesitated for a few seconds, then crisply replied:

"I'll smoke. It goes for his friend, of course?"

"Of course. I vouch for it. You'll open up your game as usual tonight?"

Oakes nodded and turned to retreat among the wagons. Kitts halted him by saying:

"Meet my friend Laramie Pete, trader. He has opened a store and bar in town. Real whisky. Young man who acted foolish last night is his friend. He'll be good in the future."

"Young fool!" muttered Oakes. "Shot up two of my men."

"Laramie Pete was robbed of some money by his wagon-crew over Kiowa Crick way," continued Kitts. "Red Shirley headed the gang. Naturally he wants the money back. I've persuaded him to hold back till I could talk with you about it."

"——. Does he say I've taken any of his money?" grated Oakes.

"No. But I've told him you have a lot of influence with this new fellow called Red Shirley."

"How do you know he lost any money?"

"*Sacré!* Does *m'sieu*——"

"A moment," broke in Kitts.

Then to the gambler:

"I take his word for it, up and down. It's a matter of ten thousand dollars, gold. Will you help me get back some of it—at least half of it? It'll be for the good of the town—and for the good of your own game."

Oakes sharply called out:

"Oh, Shirley! Red Shirley! Come out here."

There was a wait of a minute; then Red Shirley's flaming head appeared from behind a clump of bushes at one side of the wagons. Either he had seen Laramie Pete approaching and had scaled the wall to take an advantageous position, or he had discovered the trader while returning to the wagons from the gulch and had halted until the situation became clear.

With lowering face he slowly advanced, his thumbs in his belt. Oakes snapped out:

"Keep your paws off them guns! This man says you lifted ten thousand dollars from his wagons before you came here. Well?"

Shirley twisted and squirmed under the cold impact of the three sets of eyes, and answered in defense:

"Me 'n' th' boys was to git a third o' his profits for fetchin' his dod-rotted wagons out here from Fort Laramie. Th' gold don't begin to make a third o' what he'll skin th' town out of."

"He tells some truth, yet he lies," quietly said Laramie Pete as the gambler looked to him for his rebuttal. "He wanted to fight California Joe. I was to give the crew a third of my profits if he whipped Joe. I agreed, as I knew he could never whip Joe. The trapper whipped this man ver' easy. If this man says this is not so I'll bring Joe out here to whip him again. Name of a wolf! I can whip him myself."

Oakes pondered the problem for a minute; then bruskly ruled:

"Get together five thousand of that coin and bring it out here. Our camp has a bad enough name without being known as a hiding-place for thieves."

"If I fetch five thousand, then him an' me is quits on it? Some of t'other boys got some of it."

"It's squared off if you produce five thousand. Only be quick. If any of your friends refuse to chip in towards the pot they'll quit camp tonight and take their chances with this man and his friends."

"Good for you, Oakes!" cried Kitts.

"Bah! What do I care for your trading friend? I simply won't spoil my bread and butter so that these men can rake off a stolen pot. If it had passed into my hands I might talk different. You heard me, Shirley?"

Shirley swore under his breath and lounged inside the wagons. After five minutes he came back with a heavy sack, which he handed to Oakes, saying:

"There's five thousand. If I didn't reckon on makin' more'n that by stickin' here I'd see Laramie Pete an' all his friends in —— before I'd give up a dollar."

"Very sensible of you, Shirley," said Kitts. "You're a stranger to us, but you're welcome so long as you pan out honest. Bygones will be bygones. Much obliged, Oakes. I knew you'd do it."

"Then you knew more'n I did," grumbled Oakes. "For a bit I was tempted to keep it and tell your friends to come and take it. But it will mostly come to me in the end."

As the trader and Kitts rode away they beheld the gambler standing on the wall, staring after them, while below him showed the head of the mad Indian.

THAT evening California Joe strolled around the town and took in the sights. A noisy group from Auraria was patronizing Laramie's bar, and, together with Denver's bibulous, was keeping the proprietor and Old Missouri on the jump.

Natchez helped during the first of the rush, then stole away to the wagons to be near his sweetheart. Tom Reason, abhorring a crowd, was there, a willing captive to Miss June's musical voice.

Joe halted before the gambling-shed, and the men, having heard of the feud between him and the gambler, wildly scattered in anticipation of gun-play. The two stood facing each other. Oakes stared malevolently, his two hands closed over a deck of cards, but quick to dart to the concealed revolvers if a hostile move were made. Joe smiled grimly and raised his right hand, palm out, then turned and slowly walked away.

"He don't want none o' yer fight, Oakes," cried Bandy Benton.

Joe heard and pivoted on his heel, his face aglow at the prospect of trouble. But before he could take a step toward the group sheltering his critic, Oakes cried out:

"You are a poor, drunken fool. Make sure of this: you don't want any of *his* fight. The game is open, gentlemen."

Restrained by a generous sense of humor, Joe strolled to the tent by the cottonwoods, intending to pass a word with Laramie, find the bottom of one dipper and then go back to the wagons. He waited until there was a lull in the trade, when Laramie Pete pushed forward a drink and murmured:

"Five thousand brought back from the camp of wagons. I have it here behind the bar. It goes with me to my wagons when I close up. M'sieu Oakes was ver' glad to help M'sieu Kitts get it back for me.

"I lose five thousand. It is to weep! But I save five thousand. I must feel I have my satisfy."

"Kitts is all right, but that Oakes is a snake. He'd 'a' pouched th' whole ten thousand if he'd 'lowed he could git away with it. He helped git it back because he was 'fraid there'd be a fight an' in th' wind-up he'd be run out o' town. He'd rather pay five thousand out of his pocket then to have his game stopped. Don't waste any thanks on that critter.

"Wal, I'll be goin' back an' see th' little lady. If I hang round these diggin's any longer I'll be combin' that white-headed Injun-murderer's ha'r. So Tom 'n' me will be pullin' out 'bout tomorrer."

Laramie did not protest against this early leave-taking. His agreement with Kitts pushed Joe and Reason to the background of his thoughts. He was truly grateful for all the aid they had given him, yet he was a trader; and gratitude could never proceed to embarrassing lengths in his game.

As Joe walked toward the foot of the sand-hills the men from Auraria exploded in a climax of high spirits, fired a few guns without doing any harm, paused to lose their money at faro, then suddenly decided to return to their side of the creek and call it a night.

After their departure the night became less hectic. Oakes continued dealing to a fairly orderly crowd. His Indian sat by his side, cutting the cards on each deal and notching his stick.

Laramie took his bag of gold, and, leaving the bar in charge of Old Missouri, wandered to the gaming-place. More as an appreciation of Oakes' influence in recovering the gold for him than from any desire to play he risked a few gold-pieces. He purposed losing a few hundred dollars, but instead of losing he won. Somewhat disgruntled at taking money from the man who had been instrumental in forcing a partial restitution, he staked all his winnings and felt relieved on seeing them cross to the opposite side of the counter.

On returning from Hell-on-Wheels Laramie had left his horse hitched outside the tent. He tied the bag of gold to the saddle-horn and led the animal toward the wagons. He had nearly reached the wagons and was circling a small sand-hill when a man rose directly in front of him, poked the barrel of a long pistol into his face and hoarsely whispered:

"Stick up yer hands! Make a sound an' I'll blow yer head off. Now stand still!"

As he spoke the outlaw reached forward with his left hand and cut the rope holding the bag.

"Now take yer nag an' move on mighty pert," ordered the outlaw.

"*Oui, m'sieu.* But pardon. Are you the Half-Mask?" politely asked Laramie, striving to glimpse the fellow in the opaque darkness.

"Bull's-eye first shot," growled the outlaw. "But move along. I wanter see yer

figger cuttin' th' sky-line on top that hill."

Laramie stepped to his horse's head, intending to place the animal between him and the outlaw, then draw a weapon and fight to the death for his gold. But as his hand touched the bridle his head filled with terrible thunder, sheets of fire flashed before his eyes, and he fell in his tracks.

The outlaw, who had used his pistol as a club, leaned over him to deal a second blow but decided that one had been sufficient. The horse was galloping to the wagons, where his arrival would give the alarm. Carrying the bag in one hand and a fresh pistol in the other, the masked figure stole among the hills.

CHAPTER IX

BLOOD ON THE MEDICINE

"M'SIEU JOE! Have the good heart to wake up," gasped Laramie Pete as he kneeled beside the trapper.

Joe's eyes opened at the first words, as did Reason's. Twelve feet away, wrapped in his blankets, Natchez slumbered peacefully.

"I'm awake as a owl," murmured Joe. "What's the row?"

Holding his aching head, the trader gave a disjointed recital of the robbery. The loss of the money hurt him much worse than the cowardly blow. Interrupting a spluttering string of anathemas, Joe demanded—

"But what does he look like?"

"It was quite dark. I could only see outlines. Once when his face was turned toward the stars I made out his mask. Holy blue! To be knocked down like a beef! To be robbed!"

"Where's yer hoss?" asked Joe, sitting up and drawing his blanket around his shoulders.

"He should be here. You should have heard him," cried the trader.

"Wal, we didn't hear him, an' that's proof he ain't here," grumbled Joe, getting to his feet.

Then to his companion:

"It ain't no use, Tommy. Our trip to th' Mormon country an' to Oregon must wait, even if it means we must fight our way through passes filled with snow.

"Laramie, Tom 'n' me was reckonin' on pullin' our freight at sunup. But this Half-Mask cuss has challenged us. Whoever he is he's been keepin' a keen eye on ye, or else some one at Hell-on-Wheels has been tellin' him things. Most likely it was that —— Oakes. An' th' Mask must know Tom 'n' me is herdin' with ye. It's a slap in our two faces. What say, Tommy?"

"Same thing."

"Then that's settled. We'll be stirrin' afore sunup. No use to look for a trail till light. Ye'll stay here, Laramie, an' 'tend to yer knittin'. My friend an' me will see what we can fetch home. Better go look for yer hoss. Prob'ly stopped at a patch o' grass to feed."

"Am I to be made laugh of by the miners for sending friends after what I should get back myself?" fiercely cried the trader. "By the buffalo medicine of the Dakota I will stretch that black massassauga rattlesnake's scalp on a red-willow hoop!"

"I'll be packin' my medicine snake along. Reckon ye won't need to bother. Let's go to sleep," mumbled Reason.

"If ye chase after this varment ye'll lose lots o' trade," reminded Joe. "Better keep trade movin' while it's good. My time ain't worth nothin'."

This advice appealed to Laramie. His heart was in his wagons. Ignorant of any physical fear, he was heavily fettered by the lust for gain.

As the heat died out of his anger he agreed that his first duty was to his daughter, which was interpreted by him to mean the piling up of worldly gear for her inheritance. But he did insist on riding with the trappers as far as the camp on wheels. This was reluctantly agreed to by Joe, and after the stray horse had been rounded up the men returned to their blankets.

An hour before sunrise the three were making ready to depart. Some premonition of her father's errand brought Miss June's tousled head through the sides of the wagon covering. Laramie touched a finger to his lips, nodded toward the sleeping Natchez, and softly whispered:

"I ride away on a little journey, a ver' little journey, *ma petite*. Keep the boy here. I think you have ver' little trouble. Messieurs Joe and Reasong go with me.

"I will leave word for the Arapahoes to watch over you while I am away. But I will be back in ver' few hours."

"But, father," she whispered, rubbing the last of the sleep from her eyes, "why

do you go? I'm afraid to have you go."

"Am I a child, little one? Look for me when I come. It will be ver' soon."

"He'll be back, miss, inside o' three hours," spoke up California Joe. "Don't fret any."

"Say nothing to the miners. There is no danger for me. Tell Natchez I order him to stay here with you," completed Laramie, swinging into the saddle.

"He will stay," she quietly assured them, allowing her dark eyes to dwell on the mummy shape beyond the coals of the camp-fire. "Kiss me, *mon père.*"

The men rode swiftly to the spot where Laramie had been held up. He could observe no signs, but Joe and Reason dismounted and cast about on their hands and knees like two shaggy dogs. They made circles about the spot, and at last rose and spat out some oaths. And Joe said:

"No signs of his havin' a hoss here. Must 'a' cached his hoss back near th' town. I find where he sneaked in atween them two little hills. He went back th' same way after givin' ye that crack on th' head. But th' trail soon hits th' Injun path leadin' to th' crick, an' it's that trod down ye can't make out nothin'.

"No doubt but what he's doubled back to some o' th' cañons. He may have stopped at Hell-on-Wheels for grub. That's as far as ye can go with us anyway."

"I believe he's there now. Nest o' skunks," said Reason.

"M'sieu Reasong, you speak ver' much truth. The white-haired man will know. We will go there."

"Don't meddle with my plans. Don't try to boss things," warned Joe. "How's yer medicine workin, Tommy?"

"It says there's blood on this day," mumbled Reason. "Don't say whose blood."

"Wal, if they don't draw off more'n a quart o' mine I won't kick," said Joe. "Now we'll strike for Hell-on-Wheels an' see if we can pick up a trail."

"First I will find Left Hand," said the trader. "He must know I am away. He will look after the little one."

California Joe did not believe that any such guardianship was necessary as no harm could come to the girl during their absence. He suspected that the trader was planning to extend his search beyond the wagon camp and insist on accompanying them into the mountains. However, he voiced none of these thoughts but urged the trader to make haste and meet them at the liquor tent.

"Tom 'n' me will be waitin' for ye there," he added. "I want to have a word with Kitts."

THE trader rode toward the Arapaho village, and the trappers galloped to town. Joe was pleased to find Durgin in front of his shack, laboriously fitting a new handle to his pick. The Vermont man had made an excellent impression on the trapper. Swinging from the saddle, Joe said:

"We'll be much obleeged to ye, Durgin, if ye'll whisper to Kitts that Half-Mask robbed Laramie Pete last night an' that we're after him. Laramie's askin' th' 'Rapahoes to keep watch over his gal while we're gone. Reckon she won't need any guardin'. I'd ruther know that Kitts an' ye are keepin' a eye on th' wagons. Young Natchez will be there; but he's hot-headed, ye know."

"If that don't beat all git-out!" exclaimed Durgin. "Robbed, eh? Held up Laramie Pete! Won't there be some tall hootin' when th' Parson hears it! Killed Denham and then robs Laramie almost inside the town! Wait a minute till I wake up Kitts."

California Joe demurred, insisting it was not necessary to bring any of the miners into the affair. But Durgin was already running to a shack. In two minutes he reappeared, closely followed by Kitts, who finished strapping on his sagging belt as he came. While Durgin went to secure a horse for Kitts the latter asked for the details of the robbery, and after Joe had finished he vehemently declared:

"Denham's murder was enough to close that particular game. This fellow must be run down and finished. Inside of another six months we'll see the greatest gathering along this crick of outlaws and desperadoes that gold-mining was ever responsible for. It'll be a greater rush than forty-nine. All sensible men know it's on the way *now.* The only way to keep an even balance is to act now, and quick.

"Durgin says you're riding first to Hell-on-Wheels. Good! I don't believe Half-Mask is there, but he must have passed

near the wagons on his way to the mountains."

"We reckon he may be hidin' up in Clear Crick Cañon," said Reason.

"Mebbe ye do, but I opine th' Platte River Cañon's a more likely spot," said Joe.

"Each is about twenty miles' ride. We can search both if we have to. How many men shall we take?" asked Kitts.

"No more," Joe promptly replied. "This feller can't have many runnin'-mates. Th' four of us oughter be 'nough."

"Satisfies me if it does you. The fewer we are the sooner we'll cover the ground. We'll either have a fight or a snack to eat at the wagons. Let's be going."

"Waitin' for Laramie. Here he comes now," said Joe.

The trader joined them on the gallop, and as the four men rode from the town he briefly informed them that he had failed to see Left Hand, but had left word with his squaw. The chief was up in the hills somewhere, making medicine.

"War medicine," grunted Reason.

By the time the sun threw its first rays up the long slope leading to the Rockies the four horsemen were drawing rein outside the barricaded wagons. Smoke was rising from a fire before the brush shelter inside the circle, but none of the men were visible. Kitts volunteered to ride among the wagons and make sure that no suspicious character was quartered there; but before this plan could be agreed to an Indian poked his head above the wall and sounded a loud cry.

"Th' Pit River cuss. Old Oakes' luck," announced California Joe, gripping his rifle more tightly and sending his horse prancing to one side.

Reason executed a similar movement to the left, just as Oakes showed his white head between two wagons, his two Crimea revolvers held up for instant use, the barrier of rock concealing all but his head.

"Posse coming!" yelled a voice inside the brush shelter.

"To —— with the posse!" defied another. "We're honest men. Let 'em clean up Denver before they trouble us."

"We're not here to trouble any honest man," called out Kitts, keeping his mount in motion to discourage a hidden marksman. "Put up your guns, Oakes. We ain't after you."

"What's the game?" quietly asked Oakes, resting his weapons on the rock ledge before him.

"While you was dealing faro last night Laramie Pete here was robbed by Half-Mask. We want to make sure the skunk ain't hiding up here. So you needn't parade any guns."

"No stranger is hiding here. As for my guns, I'll keep them in hand, thank you, so long as that lanky trapper is carrying a rifle."

"I'll come in and search—" began Kitts.

"Not so long as I live," was the gambler's grim interruption. "I tell you no stranger is here and none has been here. If you suspect one of our regular crowd, name him and we'll trot him out and hear the evidence. If it sounds right you can take him. If you haven't the proof you can't take him."

"That's the talk!" bawled a miner, flinging up his ragged hat. "No Denver bunch can swagger up here and take one of our crowd."

Kitts frowned at this defiance; but, always believing that diplomacy was better than raw force, he said:

"Let's not get at each other's throats just yet. Whoever robbed Laramie Pete must have known he had just received five thousand dollars. He was held up while on his way home after closing his bar."

"How do you know but Half-Mask was only after the day's receipts? Whoever had been keeping cases on him must have seen there was lots of money crossing the bar," said Oakes.

"All right. Have it that way. Now we wish to speak with Red Shirley."

For a minute he received no answer. Oakes maintained his watchfulness, his two guns resting on the rock wall with his hands ready to grab them, his eyes never leaving the horsemen. Rapid exclamations ran through the thin line of miners as they crouched behind wagons and stones. At last a man called out:

"That Shirley man ain't here. Him and four of his pals quit this place this morning."

"How long ago, neighbor?" drawled California Joe.

"Oh, two or three hours."

"*Hay-al*" yelled Reason, kicking his horse and riding toward the distant mountains. "There they go!"

With a yell California Joe sped after

him, leaving Kitts and Laramie to follow. The five fugitives were racing their horses up the slope to find shelter in some cañon. Their flight fastened guilt upon them. When the small posse first appeared, they had left the walled wagons, crawled out of the inclosure on the back side and procured their horses from some adjacent patch of grazing-ground. The man who declared that they had left two or three hours before the Denver men's arrival had lied, as their start consisted only of minutes.

AS THE four galloped after the runaways, Oakes and the others behind the wagons climbed on to the walls to watch the chase. The Pit River Indian was affected most peculiarly by the pursuit. Screaming like a fiend, he climbed over the wall and brandished his bow and arrows wildly. Yet instead of following the horsemen he suddenly conceived a savage enmity toward the spectators on the wall. He turned about and would have discharged an arrow had not Oakes anticipated his homicidal design by throwing down a revolver and toppling him over. The pursuers glanced back at the sound of the shot, and surmised the nature of the tragedy on beholding the Indian's prostrate form, while Oakes leaned forward ready for a second shot.

"Killed his luck!" Joe yelled to Reason.

"Black-hearted cuss!" cried Reason. "Told ye my snake medicine had blood on it. It's got white blood on it, too."

Kitts now swept alongside of Joe and said: "They're winding their nags on that slope. We'll soon get them."

The level rays of the sun illumined the quintet and glossed the gold in Shirley's hair. The latter had dropped to the rear and kept turning his head to mark the progress of the chase. Joe squealed in delight on discovering that the man's horse had gone lame.

He had barely announced this much when Shirley halted, and, swinging about, lifted his heavy rifle to his shoulder and took deliberate aim. The four men instantly sent their horses apart, none knowing which was the fellow's target. To spoil Shirley's aim Joe took a snap-shot at his horse. The horse went down but not before Shirley pulled trigger. With a grunt Laramie Pete turned half-way around in his saddle and dropped his rifle.

Kitts fired next, and Shirley toppled across his horse. The remaining four fugitives discharged a wild volley and dipped from sight over the top of a rolling hill.

"Where'd he git ye, Pete?" cried Joe, spurring to the trader's side.

"*Sacré!* Name of the devil! He snapped my arm," gritted Laramie, already fashioning a sling out of a neckerchief with his free hand and teeth. "Upper bone broken. But let us ride on, my friend."

"Go back to the wagons. Oakes will fix you up," commanded Kitts.

Laramie swore in French, English and several Indian tongues and sent his horse after his friends. The four halted when they came to Red Shirley. Joe leaped to the ground, kicking the man's gun away, and kneeled beside him to see how badly he was hurt. The former wagon-boss was breathing his last, yet his eyes glittered evilly as he stared up into the trapper's face.

"What made ye run? Do ye belong to Half-Mask's gang?" asked Joe.

"I did belong," corrected Shirley in a whisper. "Jest j'ined. We run 'cause he told us to if any one come to find us."

"What does he look like?" demanded Joe.

"Who is he?" cried Reason.

The malevolence died from the man's face, leaving it blank. The trapper believed he was beyond any ability to identify the masked leader. Suddenly the mortally wounded man rallied and began mumbling:

"None o' th' fellers knew him out of his mask. Never see him except he had it on. Think he was some one at th' wagons. Might 'a' been any of 'em for all I know. That's all.

"We wanted easy gold. He promised it. I might give a close guess who he is. Wait—wait a minute."

But they needs must wait through all eternity if they waited for Red Shirley to speak with earthly voice again. As the death-rattle sounded California Joe leaped to his feet and complained:

"Two more inches o' life an' we'd known what th' poor cuss suspected. Now to catch some of 'em alive!"

"Laramie can't go with us," remonstrated Reason. "Look at him!"

The trader's face was of a ghastly pallor which even his naturally dark complexion and the heavy tan could not conceal.

Kitts shifted his gloomy gaze from the dead man to the trader and said:

"You must go back. Your arm must be fixed up."

"*Ouil Ouil*" faintly agreed Laramie. "Ride on, my friends. I go back ver' quick."

As he reined his horse about he swayed in the saddle and might have fallen had not Reason's strong arm supported him.

"Take him back, Parson," growled Joe. "Tom 'n' me can chase these critters alone."

Expressing his exasperation in low-voiced oaths, Kitts rode beside the trader and consented to escort him to town.

"Don't try to more than find out where they hide up," he warned Joe. "I'll have Oakes send men to fetch in Shirley's body and bury it. As soon as I get your friend fixed up I'll follow after you with a posse. Leave signs to show which way you're making."

Joe nodded and raced up the slope, only finding on reaching the top of the hill that the four men had vanished. Reason followed, yelling something unintelligible. Joe slowed down to permit his friend to catch up with him, and when Reason did so he exclaimed:

"That Injun has mighty strong medicine! Wish I was sure my snake is as good."

"Derned poor medicine when it come to a pinch. Let him be shot down by th' murderer of his whole fambly."

"Wal, if ye'd squinted back at th' wagons afore ye dipped over th' rise ye'd seen that same Injun walkin' round in circles with both hands on his head."

"So? Wal, Tommy, yer snake medicine hit it off mighty pert. Ye said there was white as well as red blood; an' here's a red an' white man wounded, an' th' red-head dead. An' his dyin' don't help us any in l'arnin' who'n sin this Half-Mask is. I still say it's Old Oakes."

"But he was dealin' his game last night."

"Part o' th' night. I ain't sure he was dealin' when Laramie started for home."

"Laramie says Half-Mask used rough language. Oakes is pretty-spoken."

"So's th' devil," grimly reminded Joe. "We'll put it another way. Nothin' to stop Oakes from gittin' one of his men to use th' mask an' make th' hold-up. If th' feller was killed th' hunt of Half-Mask would stop. If he got clear folks would believe Half-Mask was some ignerant feller.

"We both can cut this notch in our stick; Half-Mask ain't nobody's fool. These fellers we're chasin' are jest blind tools. Lost all hankerin' to wipe 'em out. Better to let 'em live an' foller 'em till they lead us to their boss."

CHAPTER X

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE CAÑON

FOR twenty miles the trappers searched for Half-Mask. At last they found themselves in the Cañon of the Platte without having discovered any sign of his trail. It was California Joe's insistence that took them thither. Reason, scarcely less insistent, had urged that they first search Clear Creek Cañon. But Joe had had his way.

They were now at the beginning of fifty miles of crooks and turns, walled in by precipitous heights or gradual slopes. A pistol-shot away up the river seemed to issue from the base of an overhanging cliff. A brief reconnaissance brought them to the bend and permitted another vista to invite their exploration. The cañon, twisting and turning, alternated between stretches of thousand-foot walls so close to the stream that only a slit of blue sky could be seen, with the day's seasoning of sunshine enduring only for minutes, and here and there wider spaces where the walls had begrudgingly withdrawn.

Through the crevices the river was tumultuous, and, brawling violently, proceeded with its work of erosion. Where the walls were broken down and the slopes permitted an escape from the bottom of the cañon the waters were almost placid in their relaxations.

California Joe had selected this locale as a likely hiding-place for the outlaws because of its innumerable recesses, its tortuous course and the perfection of its offerings for ambuscades. Longer and wilder than the Clear Creek Gorge, it should be, he logically maintained, Half-Mask's first choice as a retreat.

The trappers had ridden direct for the cañon, scarcely expecting to find any telltale signs on the way. Reason said that his medicine was strong, and that it had proved its worth during the first of the chase when its prophecy of blood was fulfilled.

The snakeskin had spoken truthfully at

the beginning of the quest. Now, unless the tacturn trapper's interpretation was at fault, there was to be more blood spilled before they left the turbulent stream.

"Still ye say we oughter gone Clear Crick Cañon way," said Joe after they had hobbled their horses at an opening where a fringe of cottonwood-trees had secured foothold. "How could that be right if there's blood along here?"

"Th' snake ain't said yet whose blood will be spilled here," grumbled Reason. "May be ours for all I know."

"Then that means th' outlaws are here," triumphantly retorted Joe. "We won't be bleedin' ourselves, or each other. That wouldn't make sense. Let's leave th' hosses an' scout ahead a bit."

For five hundred feet they followed along the bank of the river, then came to where the walls nearly met and where the river made an abrupt turn. Rounding this bend, Joe clutched his companion's arm and pointed triumphantly.

Above a mound of detached boulders rose a thin spiral of smoke, hardly discernible until it reached the top of the walls; for although it was not yet sundown and the heights were alive with light the bottom of the cañon was smothered in dusk. As the two watched, the spiral of smoke changed into puffs.

"Injun smoke!" regretted Joe. "Signalin' to some band up th' cañon. If they're 'Rapahoes we're all right. If they're Utes we need considerable more room."

They advanced, reconnoitering a rod at a time, gliding from gray rock to rock, now keeping well under the cliff and again compelled to crawl along the edge of the stream. The boulders hiding the fire were once a part of the cliff and in falling had choked the right bank of the cañon nearly to the river to a depth of twenty feet. They could see no men, but they did hear a sound of low chanting.

Suddenly there broke upon their ears a deep, rushing noise that did not emanate from the river. It was more like the soughing of the wind; and instinctively they raised their gaze to the sun-lighted crest of the opposite cañon wall, where the trees were toys and perfectly motionless.

"It ain't wind," whispered Joe. "It's a roarer. They're makin' medicine with it. Danged if I didn't think a rainstorm was comin'."

The fire beyond the boulders leaped higher and threw a ruddy glow above the rocks, and in this light there now appeared the nearly nude figure of an Indian. He held two oblong pieces of wood, each nearly a foot in length, secured to a thong of rawhide. By means of the cord he swung the "roarer" around his head; and again came the dull rushing sound. He leaped back to the fire, vanishing from the trappers' view, and was quickly succeeded by another, an older man, whose elbows and ankles were decorated with fragments of red flannel.

On his head was a white man's hat of black. A gaping wound through the crown of this suggested a violent death to the original owner. It was such a style of headgear as an immigrant or gold-hunter might bring from the East.

This man was a medicine-maker, for his face was painted in black and red stripes. His outstretched hands invoked the sky, the earth and the four wind quarters. And as he shifted his position he held up a buckskin bag and scattered a light-colored powder.

"Throwin' *hoddentin*," whispered Joe, giving the Apache name for the yellow dust of the tule.

"Cat-tail medicine," sneered Reason. "My snake can lick —— out o' that."

The man began chanting, and Joe exclaimed under his breath:

"Utes! Bringin' a pipe ag'in' th' 'Rapahoes! Huh! Listen to th' beggar."

For now the man's words were audible. As he scattered the pollen he kept repeating:

"We want the sun to help us. We want the moon to help us."

And then followed a similar supplication to each of the four winds, to the waters and to the earth. After each prayer the men below the rocks cried in chorus, "Be good, O Sun!" or, "Be good, O Moon!"

The glow from the hidden fire increased. Now the medicine man restored his pouch of pollen dust to his girdle and from between his feet picked up a bow and arrow.

"Now he'll make th' arrer come this way as a sign for 'em to keep on th' path," mumbled Joe.

With a great show of whispering to the arrow and of listening to its reply the medicine man finally set the notch on the string, and, drawing the bow slightly, released the shaft, apparently aiming at the zenith, but

inclining the arrow so that after rising some thirty feet it completed its parabola by curving toward the trappers. A staccato shout greeted this evidence that the war medicine was urging the Utes to continue their raid against the Arapahoes.

But even as the arrow commenced its downward flight Reason was on tiptoe, knife in hand. It fell near the edge of the river and within ten feet of the white men. With the agility and padded softness of a mountain cat Reason recovered it. He punctured his finger with his knife-point, smeared with his blood the head of the medicine arrow, which was of white quartz. Then, taking the shaft between the tips of his index fingers, he sent it like a dart up toward the dying sunlight and in a graceful curve that ended close to the fire.

EXCLAMATIONS of amazement greeted this miraculous return of the arrow. It seemed to have winged its way back to the medicine man from the bed of the river, and the sound of many hands clapped to the mouth to register great astonishment reached the trappers and permitted them to visualize what was going on behind the boulders. Then followed yelps of dismay when it was discovered that the head of white quartz was discolored with fresh blood.

The trappers began a stealthy retreat, knowing that the medicine man would make an effort to overcome the superstitious fears of his tribesmen. Either the Indians would accept the return of the arrow as being the angry disapproval of their war-god and would abandon the path; or else they would suspect a trick and rush down the cañon to find the perpetrators.

Moving noiselessly, the trappers fell back to the bend. Already the cañon was filled with darkness, and the sky was taking on the deep purple tone of approaching night.

The confusion of voices beyond the rocks continued, so Joe decided that the Utes would retreat without questioning the phenomenon further. Reason was complacently agreeing with this conclusion, and was briefly attributing all the glory to his snake medicine, which he declared had inspired him, when a circle of fire surmounted the boulders and advanced downward and toward them. It was the medicine man, venturing to investigate alone by the aid of a torch swung around his head.

As he reached the spot where the white men had stood he swung the torch more fiercely, keeping it in full bloom, and shouted loudly for his medicine to stand by him. Above him grotesquely painted heads began showing as the warriors found courage to observe him.

"He can't find a —— sign," boasted Reason, slowing up his retreat. "Th' last oilin' I give that skin brought out th' full strength. Hi! See him dance an' swing th' torch! 'Fraid it'll go out an' leave him in th' dark. In a second he'll be hoofin' it over th' rocks, an' then they'll all scatter like mountain sheep an' never stop runnin' till they reach home."

But the medicine man had courage. He persisted in his quest, and began sweeping the torch close to the ground. Like the thrust of a knife came his yell of discovery.

A warrior was bold enough to scramble down and join him. Then the others came until Joe had counted thirty. And each in turn dropped on his knees and held his face close to the rock, while the medicine man kept the torch alive and chanted.

"What th' ——!" softly exclaimed the puzzled Reason.

"They've found blood drops where ye bleeded yerself," hissed Joe. "Why'n thunder didn't ye hold yer hand out over th' water? Huh! See that?"

This as the medicine man suddenly darted a dozen feet in their direction, yowling exultingly as his torch revealed more spots on a flat rock, left by Reason in his retreat. Calling the men to him, the medicine man assured them the war-god had not colored the arrow. For had that been the fact he surely would not run away from his children, dripping blood as he ran.

Unable to imagine the real cause of the arrow's return, he ingeniously proclaimed that the arrow in falling had hit a prowling Arapaho scout, and that his, the speaker's, personal tutelary had thrown the arrow back to the fire to betray the presence of the skulker.

No result occurs unless caused by some agency, either human or superhuman, argues the red man; and this explanation of the double trip of the arrow was thoroughly logical and entirely satisfactory to them. A general rush was made for the weapons left behind by the fire.

Reason raised his rifle as the tempting targets stood clear cut in passing the crest

of the boulders, but Joe restrained him, advising:

"Wait! Their sand may dribble away afore they come ten rods. Time 'nough to shoot when we have to. We must git back to th' hosses an' find a place to make a fight in."

They turned the corner of the mighty corridor, now feeling their way. Five hundred feet down the cañon were their horses, contentedly tearing the bark from sweet cottonwood-trees, a fodder they preferred to the richest grass. Five hundred feet in the waning light; now night was come it seemed many times that distance.

Moving slowly, they had passed a scant two hundred feet when several lights danced around the bend. Reason threw up his rifle and fired. The torches were speedily extinguished. Only the rush of the river disturbed the cañon.

The shot had evened up the question of speed; rather, it had given the whites the advantage. They could press forward with all possible haste while their pursuers must move cautiously or run the risk of walking into an ambush.

And yet the absence of the torches worked a psychological advantage to the red men. So long as the white men could see the lights they could determine the position of the foremost red scouts. Now the Utes might be anywhere, within a rod, within knife-reach.

The trappers' nerves were iron, yet the uncertainty of their situation wore on them. Their bold spirits demanded action. Joe growled that he felt like a boy hiding in a dark place and hoping he would be found. Softly gathering a handful of smooth stones, he whispered to Reason:

"I'll try to start a little landslide 'cross th' river. Yer shot told 'em white men was in th' cañon. If they bite at my bait it'll give us a chance to make th' hosses an' find a good fightin'-spot."

Stepping clear of his companion, he swung his long arm and hurled a stone through the blackness against the opposite wall, following it rapidly with others. No one could have heard the missile register, so sonorous was the river's voice; but by the time the trapper's hands were empty the sound of gravel and small stones dislodging large rocks conquered the tumult of the waters. As the débris got well under way it sent boulders flying ahead, and the cañon vibrated under the tremendous din.

The dislodged mass came to rest. The river renewed its savage song. An Indian shrilly warned that the enemy were trying to scale the opposite slope. Bows were bent and a volley of arrows whistled across the stream.

Some of the Utes called for lights that they might cross the foaming current by leaping from boulder to boulder. California Joe halted and threw more stones, but no avalanche rewarded this last effort.

A light sprang up and advanced to the river. As its bearer swung it above his head and forced it into full flame and began yelling for the others to follow, the trappers accepted him as the war-chief of the band, for he wore a shirt lavishly decorated with scalps. As he leaped from the bank to a boulder the sight of Reason's rifle halted between his shoulders. The torch died in the river; the brave's limp form fell across the rock.

At least some of the Indians did not at first seem to understand what had happened; for voices cried for the man to get up. Others yelled for another torch.

Others nearer the trappers were too busy seeking cover for the first few moments. When they had attended to their own immediate protection they began yelling that white men were shooting the torch-bearers. Before this warning could be relayed up the line a Ute lighted a torch. California Joe dropped him before he could advance a step.

INSTANTLY the Utes ceased their cries. The trappers gave ground rapidly, taking desperate chances in a last effort to reach their horses. Once Reason warned—

"They're comin'!"

Yet nothing happened, and the two came to their horses. They found the intelligent animals using their hoofs to hold a branch from which they gnawed the bark, just as a dog uses his paw in holding down a bone.

The trappers had placed another bend between them and the enemy, but knowledge of the fact did not remove their uneasiness. It was easy to imagine the Utes about to crawl around the curve and spring upon them.

"Can't see my own nose," murmured Joe. "I'll lead th' nags while ye scout ahead an' find a good fightin'-place."

After a few minutes of slow progress Reason touched his arm and whispered:

"Here to yer left. In under th' cliff. Big rocks in front to hide th' hosses."

As Joe felt his way in under the cliff he knew he stood in a small chamber cut out by the water in ancient times. In front of this were two huge rocks, their tops rounded and smoothed. In passing between the rocks Joe decided that the way was too narrow for two horsemen riding abreast.

With the animals protected, the trappers returned to the sentinel rocks and attempted to locate the Utes. Five minutes passed with no clue given as to the Indians' whereabouts.

Joe was first on his feet when what appeared to be a star came down upon them from out of the night. It fell just at the entrance between the rocks, and smoked and burned until Reason recovered his wits and smothered it with his buckskin shirt. He pronounced it to be a fire-ball of dried moss heavily smeared with bear's fat. Its flight through the air had revealed the white men's hiding-place; and a volley of arrows smashed against the rocks. Another fire-ball rose and fell, this time landing well within the inclosure and frightening the horses into leaping about.

California Joe extinguished the flames and ducked back as arrows began falling inside the barricade, the savages having shot them high in the air so they would fall point downward. Joe seized Reason by the ear, and, advancing his lips, hoarsely whispered:

"They're lightin' them balls behind some big rock, then fetchin' 'em to within throwin'-distance behind their blankets. Watch for a faint glow o' light with a dark patch in th' middle. Dark patch is th' red holdin' th' blanket."

Reason crawled to the passage between the rounded rocks, and, lying prostrate, directed his gaze up the cañon. An occasional arrow whipped in under the cliff, but without the light to guide the marksmen these were chance shots.

Reason waited and grew uneasy. He imagined that the Utes were almost upon him. He fancied he beheld sinister shapes in the darkness.

Then he glimpsed a faint aura of light surrounding a black zone. An Indian was advancing with his blanket hanging between his outstretched arms. Behind him crept a second brave, carrying the glowing fire-ball.

Reason aimed at the middle of the area fringed by the glow, and the warrior holding the blanket fell dead while the second howled with pain as the heavy ball registered a double hit. The fire-ball smoldered and threw off a dull light. It was blotted out as an Indian stooped to pick it up. California Joe's rifle brought it to view again by dropping the Indian.

Execrations were hurled at the hidden trappers, and many arrows were frantically discharged in an attempt to discourage their deadly aim. One shaft struck Joe's horse, and with a scream of pain the maddened animal bolted between the rocks and galloped toward the savages, then tripped, fell and lay helpless with a broken leg.

"Poor cuss!" groaned Joe. "Can't let him suffer if it takes our last bullet. He ain't to blame for bein' in such a fix."

The shape of the horse could be made out as it lay between the trappers and the smoldering fire-ball. Taking careful aim Joe fired and put the poor creature out of its misery.

"If that medicine o' mine don't git to workin' might' soon we'll be leavin' our ha'r somewhere round this neighborhood," growled Reason. "Never mind, Joe; we can ride double."

Joe fell to cursing the Ute nation as he fumbled in the buckskin parfleche at his waist. Finding what he desired, he crept from the shelter of the rock and located one of the dead fire-balls. Then he announced:

"Reckon I'll make a little fire of my own. When I toss it be ready to drop something."

He pulled the inflammable mass apart, welded it together in a less compact mass and lighted it with a storm match. Jumping to his feet, he threw it. It blazed brightly in its flight.

Reason had time to note that the dead horse was much elongated, and on an impulse he fired. The Ute crouching behind the dead animal began his death-song but could not finish it. With a terrific howl of rage the Indians swarmed to the attack, kicking the fire-ball into the river as they advanced.

"They mean it this time!" yelled Joe.

For it is seldom that Indians will attack in the darkness, let alone advancing in a mass. Joe emptied his rifle and began firing his revolvers, shooting blindly. Reason did likewise. Neither could see what execution

they were doing, but both knew when the tide broke against their barricade.

Joe, with his long knife, crouched low and thrust upward whenever he detected motion overhead. Reason backed his frightened horse into the opening and obligated it with many broken oaths to keep the passage clear. The horse began lashing out with his nimble hoofs, his first kick catching a warrior in the chest and causing him to cough hideously. Others crowded into the narrow way, ignorant of the terrible hoofs, and were hurled back maimed and shattered.

In the darkness the Utes fought at a disadvantage. They got in each other's way, and more than one brave wounded a friend.

Thinking to deceive the enemy into believing that a band of Arapahoes held the rocks, California Joe raised his lusty voice in the war-cry of the Cloud People. It was answered from up the slope. At first Joe supposed it to be the echo, but after it was repeated several times he yelled:

"Hooray, Tommy! Yer snake medicine is some powerful! Ol' Left Hand's crawlin' down to take a hand!"

"They come too late. Utes are runnin' away," panted Reason.

CHAPTER XI

THE MEDICINE SPRING

MORNING brought the Arapaho scouts galloping back to Left Hand and his warriors, shouting the news that the Utes had fled and were making for home, confounded by the weakness of their war medicine. Instantly the camp was alive with preparations for the chase.

While the men gathered up their war-gear and made haste to follow the scouts Left Hand rode back and forth on his spotted pony and loudly harangued his braves. He reminded them that the women were waiting to hear how each man bore himself. He told them that the hereditary enemy were dogs and already had been whipped by two white men.

California Joe and Reason, who had quit the cañon to spend the night in the Indian camp, viewed these proceedings with indifference. They had no desire to participate in a tribal war. Joe had recovered his saddle from the dead horse, but it was with the greatest difficulty that he had persuaded Left Hand to lend him a war-pony in return for an order on Laramie Pete for blankets and calico.

Had it not been for the chief's friendship for the trader and his knowledge that the white men were on the trader's business he would have loaned none of his war-ponies at any price; and he had three with him and more at his village. But the war-pony was the Indian's strongest link to life. Buffalo ponies were held in high esteem and seldom could be purchased. The war-pony meant life itself.

"They say my white brothers ride with us to wipe out the trick the Utes played on them in the cañon," said Left Hand after ending a long speech and observing that his men were waiting for him to head the line.

"We have lost no blood," replied Joe. "Your warriors wear many scalps that our guns brought down. We are satisfied. Our hearts are light. We go back to the trader's wagons."

Left Hand was disgruntled. He had hoped to profit by the firearms and marksmanship of the whites. He also knew that to attack the Utes in their own country would call for much finesse and courage; and that at the best the Arapahoes could only dash in and strike a blow and then hastily retreat. For many years the two tribes had fought thus—one attacking, one running away, the victor of today being the fugitive of tomorrow.

But Joe was not to be tempted. Apart from his disinclination to take sides in a red fight there was his realization that the Utes would bitterly resent any white aid given their foes and would retaliate against the infant town on Cherry Creek.

"We have work to do. We must go back and hunt for the bad white man who wears a black cloth over his face," he firmly told the chief when the latter insisted the two accompany him.

For a minute the trapper believed that the chief was about to demand his war-pony back. But Left Hand was greedy to transmute the order on Laramie Pete into new blankets and gay calicos, so with a grunt of anger he wheeled and took his place at the head of the advance, and within five minutes not an Indian was in sight.

"My medicine kept a-tellin' me all th' time we oughter go to Clear Crick Cañon," complained Reason.

"Wal, yer medicine can't say we didn't find *somethin'* here," growled Joe. "If

we hadn't run into th' Utes they'd 'a' took their fightin' to Cherry Crick, an' some of our friends would 'a' been rubbed out in the fuss. We'll strike for Clear Crick now."

The way was rough and they advanced slowly. They had covered about a mile when they were surprized to sight a mounted Indian riding toward them at reckless speed. Reason fingered his rifle, but Joe restrained him by saying—

"'Rapaho a little late in comin' to th' party."

"He's a medicine man," said Reason, respect softening his gruff voice. "Been up in th' mountains to make war medicine for this raid. Wonder what he uses."

The Indian saw them and swerved to one side as if to take to cover. Joe lifted an open hand and cantered forward. The Indian shaded his eyes with his hand, recognized the trapper and galloped ahead. When they met the Arapaho's mount reared, his forefeet pawing the air, and the shield on the man's back flopped around and over his chest as if by accident. He cried out—

"Why is the trail closed against me, a medicine man of the Arapahos?"

"The trail is very wide and very smooth. There is nothing to stop the mighty Arapaho magician," said Joe, backing his pony from the rough trail.

"You ride the war-pony of a great chief," suspiciously remarked the Indian.

"Because I am a friend to the big chief. Did you think I stole it from him? I visit his village. I am made welcome. My pony was killed by Utes. Left Hand tells me to ride this war-pony back to his village. We have smoked together."

The medicine man was satisfied; not so much because of the trapper's explanation as because there was no sign of the white men being pursued, which would have been the case had the pony been stolen from a war camp. Joe continued:

"My friend and I killed many Utes in the cañon last night. They say you have made medicine against the Utes."

"I was in the mountains, in a high place, from sun to sun. It was my medicine that killed the Utes last night," the medicine man proudly informed them.

"He's a —— liar!" growled Reason. "It was my snake medicine. An' him tryin' to hog th' charms o' my medicine!"

Then maliciously—

"Ask him when he got that hole through the rim of his shield."

The hole was never made by spear nor arrow. Joe pointed to it and put the question. The Indian flipped the shield behind him, his painted face scowling maliciously. He reluctantly explained:

"A white man's long gun did that. If not for my magic he would have killed me. After we have cut off the heads of the Utes I will make a white medicine that will make him wither up and die."

Joe's eyes sparkled. "Was it near here? Did you see him?"

The Indian hesitated, then answered: "It was very far away. I did not see him."

Saying this, he kicked his heels into the pony and darted away to overtake his friends.

"He's a clumsy liar," mused Joe. "He spent the night high in th' mountains an' didn't git started to overtake th' band till sunrise. Th' place must be very near here. I'm keen to see th' white man that tried to plug him. None o' th' Cherry Crick men would be fools 'nough to kill a 'Rapaho."

"He must 'a' been fired at after he came down th' mountain this mornin'. Most likely while afoot," said Reason. "Mebbe th' cuss wanted to git his pony."

"If he come down th' mountain an' was shot at while jumpin' on his pony it might be at a dozen different p'ints," mused Joe. "If he'd told where it was——"

"But he wouldn't 'cause it was hitched up to his medicine," triumphantly broke in Reason. "Yes, siree! That's it! Hitched up with his medicine; an' he won't blat it to no one. If it wa'n't that way he'd tell, hopin' we'd find th' feller an' pot him."

"Where he went on th' mountain would be a medicine place," pondered Joe. "But this feller wouldn't be climbin' mountains."

"Bet I've found th' trail!" cried Reason, showing what for him was unusual excitement. "It was at th' b'ilin' spring. Bet he went there to make gifts to his medicine after he quit th' mountain. Got off his pony an' kneeled by th' spring an' th' white man took a crack at him with a rifle an' plugged th' shield."

"We'll hit for th' spring!" exclaimed Joe, taking his friend's surmise as an inspiration. "Lordy, but ye're a cute cuss, Tommy, when it comes down to guessin' things! I know all 'bout that spring, an' it never come into my head."

CALIFORNIA JOE pressed ahead eagerly, Reason at his heels. Within half a mile of where they met the medicine man were two springs, one of which was held in great reverence by the Arapahoes and considered with fear and awe by other tribes. Although issuing from the rocks quite near together, one was cold and sweet, the ordinary mountain spring, while the other was exceedingly bitter.

Both springs were once sweet, the legend ran, but a Comanche murdered a kinsman from a northern tribe by drowning him in one of the springs. Ever since the homicide the waters of one spring had been rank and bitter.

Reason accepted the legend as a fact. To his simple mind it adequately explained what otherwise would be an inexplicable phenomenon.

More susceptible to superstitious fears than his friend, he did not relish Joe's proposal to visit the haunted spot. The place was guarded by spirits. It was sacred to the Arapahoes; and even they went there timidly, and then only when bent on propitiating their war-god with gifts. Ute and Comanche and other tribes avoided the place, and when compelled to pass it paid toll in the shape of gifts tossed into the bitter waters. The wild and rugged surroundings had as yet offered no lure to white adventurers.

"No good goin' there," protested Reason, his eyes rolling uneasily. "My snake is ag'in' any such notion."

"I was there once," mused Joe. "Took four mighty fine packs o' beaver th' 'Rapahoes had left as a present to their spirit. Got top price for 'em, too."

"You robbed their medicine?" gasped Reason.

"I borrered 'em," corrected Joe. "What of it? Red medicine can't hurt me. That is, it ain't hurt me yet; an' that was years ago."

"A man's a fool to go nosin' in where he ain't wanted," said Reason. "What's th' good o' makin' their medicine mad? Ye say it can't hurt ye? How do ye know but even yet ye'll be killed on account o' them four packs o' beaver? Injun medicine is like th' Injun, never in a hurry. Bimeby, some time, mebbe. That's Injun, an' Injun medicine. After stealin' their beaver ye oughter be th' last man to go there."

"I didn't steal 'em!" angrily denied Joe. "I needed fur mighty bad. I seen them packs. I knew th' medicine had took th' spirit packs. What's th' use o' lettin' th' earthly packs lay there an' rot? I held 'em one at a time an' asked—

"'Mind if I borrer these till I can fetch back four packs to take their place?'

"I waited five minute an' didn't hear a thing. So I knew 'twas all right to take 'em. If it had thundered or a tree had fell down or a rock slipped I'd 'a' dropped 'em fast 'nough. But nary a sound. Even th' wind didn't make any ghost noises among th' trees. I'll pay 'em back some day when I got plenty o' packs an' lots o' time.

"We'll go there 'cause I'm thinkin' th' spirit o' th' place knows we're tryin' to find an' run out a simon-pure robber, one that would steal everything in th' spring. It would be a derned fool medicine that would tackle me when I'm jest tryin' to lambast a reg'lar thief. An' I have great hopes my guess was right when I picked this piece o' country as bein' Half-Mask's stampin'-ground."

"I can see it all now," moodily mumbled Reason. "I can understand now why my medicine after tellin' us to go to Clear Crick wa'n't strong 'nough to make ye go there. Th' medicine o' th' b'ilin' spring was stronger'n th' snake medicine, an' it kept callin' on ye to come to it so it could even up for them four packs o' beaver."

"Th' ——! Don't talk like a half-wit!" exploded California Joe. "Ain't I sayin' I'll fetch back eight packs for th' four I borrered? We won't stop there but a second. If nothin' turns up we'll push on to Clear Crick. Or ye can go there now an' I'll come along an' find ye somewhere."

"Ugh! Shet up!" growled Reason.

Scrub pine and spruce, massed in funereal lines, blocked the vision in every direction; and had the region not been held sacred to the spirit of the spring it would have afforded excellent ground for ambushes. The two men talked not at all as they pressed ahead; for even California Joe was unwholesomely affected by the somber atmosphere, reenforced by his recollection of various legends of a gruesome nature.

They had just emerged into a circular-shaped opening clear of trees but studded with boulders when Reason's horse stumbled and pitched his rider half out of the saddle. At the same moment a bullet whistled over the saddle and would have

killed him had he been sitting erect.

The sound of the shot was an excellent tonic for Joe, who forgot everything except the chance for action. Almost before the echo had answered the assassin's attempt the trapper was firing into a clump of conifers, where he had detected the black smoke of a high-power rifle.

"The snake saved me!" gurgled Reason, regaining his balance and charging recklessly toward the ambush.

Joe followed. As they were forced to halt by the trees a faint crackling sound advertised the retreat of the would-be murderer. Dismounting and bending low, the two dashed into the cover. The small area covered by the evergreens was empty of any enemy. Bursting clear of it, they glimpsed a horseman spurring madly across a tiny opening and all but within the shelter of the pines.

The man wheeled to gaze back, and both suppressed a yell of triumph on beholding that the face was half-concealed by a black mask which began just above the eyes and ended at the tip of the nose. Reason, who was ready to fire, for once lacked precision, and missed. With another plunge the outlaw's mount disappeared, but not before a branch swept off the black felt hat and allowed the pursuers to note a shock of white hair.

"Old Oakes!" howled California Joe, beginning to empty his revolvers in the direction taken by the fugitive.

"I was expectin' him. Rather, I was hopin' to see him. Then when I did see him I lost my nerve," bitterly complained Reason.

"He give me a start worse'n if he was th' whole Ute nation," babbled Joe. "No more peace tobacker between him an' me if ever I git back to Denver an' git him in front of a gun-barrel."

"On sight, like a dog!" gritted Reason.

They entered the bush at a mad gallop, shooting ahead as they rode, and met with no opposition. They forced their horses through barriers of low-hanging branches and came upon signs of the man's flight. Blurred hoof-prints in the scanty soil and broken branches pointed the way for some rods. Then the evergreens were succeeded by a rocky slope, where boulders were piled in fantastic forms as if some child-giant had amused himself and had neglected to pick up his toys.

No longer was it possible to follow a trail; and, fearing that Half-Mask might be hiding at any point in a position to pick them off with his high-power rifle, both dismounted and found shelter in a half-circle of rocks, where they took counsel.

They finally decided to leave their horses in this cover, separate and scout to the foot of the slope where the stunted growth began again. They did their work thoroughly and satisfied themselves that the outlaw had not lingered to contest their pursuit.

Recovering their horses, they returned to the growth and searched for signs along its edge. Failing to find a trail, they admitted defeat and swung back to the course which would take them to the spring.

DURING this part of the journey nothing was seen or heard of the outlaw. Both were now convinced that the Arapho medicine man had been fired upon just as he was leaving the medicine spring, or after he had traveled a short distance from it. Believing that the game was reversed and that Half-Mask might now be stalking them, they refrained from mounting and used all their craft in keeping on the alert. Although suspecting that the outlaw might be watching them from some high point beyond rifle range, they took care to conceal their trail. Seams of naked rock were taken advantage of.

They came to a narrow strip of grass, like a ribbon thrown on a rock heap, and beyond this a spring overflowed its basin of living stone. The horses impatiently trotted down the grassy way, passing the spring and halting only when they came to another, from which they drank eagerly and then fell to grazing.

Joe wondered aloud how the animals could so readily distinguish between the sweet and the mineral springs. Reason drank and then suggested that they rest on the grass while the horses fed. But Joe was filled with the original plan of visiting the medicine spring, and refused to listen. Driving the horses before him, he returned to the first rock basin, his friend grumbling and following him reluctantly.

With the exception of the spot where the bitter waters found an outlet over the rim of the rock facing the narrow lane of grass ground, the spring was surrounded

by a broad shelf of bare ledge. This was heaped with beads and red cloths, knives and steel-tipped arrows. Hanging from the trees were moccasins and deerskins. Some of the moccasins were new and some were stamped by the lapse of many years. In the spring itself were brass ornaments and a number of round objects the size of a man's fist.

Joe examined the deerskins, and whispered:

"Utes left these here. Deerskin peace offerin's."

"Them's Comanche moccasins," muttered Reason, nodding toward a pair. "Reckon they never fight when they meet here."

Joe examined the ground in front of the spring and answered:

"No, they won't fight here. 'Rapahoes 'low this is their partic'lar ground an' they've danced a war-dance here more'n once. But they wouldn't make any war-path round this place. They wouldn't dare to try to stop other Injuns from leavin' presents here for their gods, for then they'd be 'fraid their gods would git mad an' quit 'em."

"That's hoss sense," quickly agreed Reason. "Say ye wanted to give my snake a feast an' I should stop ye. Reckon th' snake would have a mighty poor notion of me."

"S'pose so," murmured Joe absent-mindedly. "Now if any o' them moccasins is weather tight an' will fit me I'd like to borrer a pair——"

"No, no!" hurriedly cried Reason. "No good will come o' robbin' th' spring of its medicine presents. Yer feet might all wither up."

"There wa'n't no kick made 'bout my borrerin' th' beaver packs," returned Joe.

But Reason was so deadly in earnest that his friend promised to disturb none of the foot-gear, and with his mind at ease Reason began casting about for some sign of the outlaw. While he worked down the stretch of grass Joe took the opposite direction, and it was the latter who made a discovery of prime importance.

He had examined the ground for several hundred feet beyond the spring and had worked through the scrub several rods to a small glade. His low cry brought Reason to his side on the jump.

At one edge of the glade, pitched under the boughs of a pine, was a wall-tent. It was weather-stained and showed much usage. The mystery surrounding it was heightened by the fact that the side was down, thus concealing the interior.

Here were great dramatic possibilities in small compass. Both tragedy and treasure might be behind the soiled canvas.

It was the style of tent often used by surveying-parties seeking railroad routes to the Pacific. Joe had seen many such in northern California and in the Oregon country. Set back under the pine, with other trees crowding close, it was not to be easily discovered unless some one stumbled upon it by accident.

Both men drew their weapons and began closing in. The silence of the glade was oppressive. There was something very sinister in the tightly drawn side. It suggested a grim secretiveness.

The trappers separated to approach from opposite directions. Reason arrived first, extended his hand to tear aside the canvas, then hesitated and waited until Joe attained a similar position. Then with an exchange of glances they simultaneously seized the canvas, threw it up and with their free hands thrust their revolvers inside.

The tent was empty, yet the anticlimax was almost as unnerving as if they had found some tangible piece of gruesome work. The absence of the owner only prolonged the mystery.

On a couch of boughs was a roll of blankets. The trappers examined the boughs and agreed that they had been cut and placed there within two weeks.

In one end were heaped a small stock of bacon, a bag of beans, flour for flapjacks, a frying-pan and a pot filled with coffee beans. All in all it was a prosaic and homely exhibit, and yet it left the story unfinished. It was a white man's outfit; but why should a white man camp there?

Joe remarked on the absence of any weapons, even of powder and ball; but he did unearth from beneath the provisions a jug containing a small amount of Taos lightning.

"Queer deal," whispered Reason. "Th' cuss didn't even have a spare gun."

Joe stared thoughtfully at the frying-pan and coffee-pot and murmured:

"Wrong trail. This ain't Half-Mask's layout."

"What is it then?"

"It's what he an' all th' men on Cherry Crick would give all their dust to find. It's th' hidin'-place o' Lucky Denham. His secret mine is mighty close by."

"Lucky Denham! Dead man's tent!" shivered Reason, edging into the free air. "His medicine was weaker'n water."

"That's 'cause he tried to mix it with Taos lightning," said Joe. "See how th' signs shape up? We start to find Half-Mask. He's trying to find Denham's lost mine.

"We meet th' Mask within a mile o' here an' have a scrimmage with him. Neither he nor us knew anything 'bout this tent. He's makin' his first visit to this neck o' th' woods. But where'n sin is th' lost mine?"

"Where'n th' —— is Half-Mask?" gruffly amended Reason.

"Mebbe we'll l'arn both things if we prod round a trifle."

"But how could he do any minin' without powder, a pick an' a shovel?" puzzled Reason, now squatting on his heels outside the tent. "They say that Wakanaga, the first father o' th' Shoshone people, is mighty fussy 'bout th' people that hang round this place. S'pose we draw out from here an' look for that outlaw feller."

"If he could stand for a drunken feller like Denham——"

" 'Pears he couldn't. Denham's dead."

"Wal, now that I'm here I'm goin' to look around for Denham's diggin's."

"How could he dig with no shovel nor pick?"

"Left his tools at th' diggin's. Either that, or it's free gold. Some place where he found it all ready for th' takin'."

"It brought him death."

"Mebbe Taos lightnin' helped him over th' divide. If he'd been sober he might 'a' put up a fight when Half-Mask jumped him."

"He never had a chance, drunk or sober. Shot down from behind," dully persisted Reason.

"Too much talk. Come along, or stick here?"

"Not here," was the emphatic rejoinder.

JOE circled the tent and at the back came upon a faint trail which he believed had been made by Lucky Denham. He followed it, pausing frequently to satisfy himself that Half-Mask was not spying on them.

The path kept well within the evergreens and came to an end in a clump of dark pines. As they halted and stared about the circle of conifers the tinkling of falling water came musically to their ears. Dropping on all fours and pushing his rifle ahead of him, Joe crawled toward the sound, and grunted in disgust as he emerged at the back of the rock basin containing the mineral spring. Beyond the spring were the moccasins and deerskins. Directly beneath him and in the bottom of the spring were the round objects he had seen when standing on the opposite side.

"Old Wakanaga's medicine is workin' strong," groaned Reason. "Fetched us right back here."

"What's them things down in th' water?" whispered Joe.

"Look like toads turned to stone."

"I'm goin' to have one."

"Don't, Joey! Don't touch th' contraptions! Lawd only knows how many years they've been there," cried Reason in a pleading voice.

"Think th' earth's goin' to crack an' rip open when I lift one o' them?" sneered Joe. "Wal, let her rip! Here goes!"

He leaned out over the spring, thrust his arm to the shoulder into the water and clutched one of the objects. It felt soft and velvety to the touch and he could not repress a little shudder. It was much like laying a hand on some repulsive reptilian species.

Reason waited, his eyes bulging, possibly expecting the sky or earth to crack open at the sacrilege. Nothing happened, and with a low exclamation of triumph Joe fished up his loot. It was a buckskin bag, like those the Indians carried for a medicine pouch. Only this, because of its weight, he knew could not contain the usual valueless odds and ends of bones and feathers.

Reason begged:

"Drop it, ye fool! Bad luck to touch presents made to a medicine."

"Fool yerself," growled Joe, holding the bag up before him. "No paint nor medicine truck in that pouch. If this ain't Lucky Denham's placer diggin's, then I'm a Bannock!"

"Yer head's been touched by Wakanaga!" whispered Reason.

"Yer own head is soft," chuckled Joe, working at the rawhide string securing the mouth of the bag. "Th' Injuns found free

gold somewhere, an' not havin' any use for it they heaved it into this spring for th' spirits to spend.

"Denham happened along by here an' spotted 'em. Fished out one an' found he didn't have to do no gulch minin'. Kept it dark an' packed out a tent an' grub.

"When he wanted to go on a drunk he took a bag an' emptied it into his tobacker pouch an' lit out for Cherry Crick. He knew th' stuff was waitin' for him, that no Injuns would loaf round th' spring an' that there wa'n't nothin' to call white men here; so he took his time in sneakin' back without lettin' any one foller him. Yes, sir, that feller's been fishin' medicine gold out of this spring. Jest heft it an' see how heavy it is."

As he extended the bag toward his friend a rifle cracked and the heavy bullet struck the bag and scattered the precious dust over the two. With convulsive flops the trappers regained the shelter of the pines and set about locating their would-be slayer.

Reason accepted the attack philosophically. He was relieved to know that a human being and not some spirit guardian of the spot had assailed them. Joe was furiously angry, and was quite inarticulate as he attempted to express his opinion of the hidden assassin.

In a few moments his passion died out and he was calmly studying the situation. Lying flat on his stomach, he lifted his right hand in the same position he had held it when offering the bag for Reason's inspection. Then he peeped out on the bare rock, where the impact of the bullet, after smashing the bag, had left a scar. He measured the angle with a single glance and then began studying the treetops beyond the narrow lane of grass.

"A plungin' shot, an' he overshot," he whispered.

Reason nodded, then caught a slight movement in a pine, and fired at guess. A dark body fell or rapidly slid down the trunk, and Joe took a snap-shot.

"We hit him!" exulted Reason, jumping from cover, skirting the spring and racing for the tree.

But no dead outlaw awaited them. There was, however, deep satisfaction in finding several drops of blood on the pine needles. They commenced searching the immediate neighborhood in the hope of finding the fellow crippled and helpless from a wound.

"Only a scratch hit. He's tied it up," grumbled Reason.

"Hark!" warned Reason, putting his hand to his ear to catch some sound.

They waited a moment, then both heard it—a voice crying out somewhere up the slope. It was a mocking, jeering voice, and the trappers flushed hotly with animosity. Then came the query—

"Do you hear me, you two fools?"

Joe pulled Reason into cover and bawled back:

"Yes; we hear ye, ye skunk. Goin' to shoot ye, too."

"After you do that go back to Cherry Crick and ask for Laramie Pete's girl. If no one can tell you come back here and ask me. I know," replied the voice.

"Wal, we're here now. Where is she?" bellowed Joe, raising his rifle.

The pines on the slope remained silent. The trappers waited, breathless, for several minutes; then Reason whispered:

"He's gone! It's time we was makin' for th' crick. Somethin' happened to th' gal."

Although as uneasy as his friend, California Joe sought to comfort himself in declaring it was only a trick to send them back to Denver. Miss June was safe at the wagons. Nothing could harm her when young Natchez and Laramie Pete, let alone the Arapahoes and decent white men, were watching over her. But even as he proclaimed this to be his belief his anxiety increased.

Reason did not attempt to cover up his apprehension. When his friend ceased speaking he briefly said—

"Our place is at Denver. Come!"

"Git th' hosses," said Joe curtly. "I'm goin' back to th' spring for a few minutes."

Reason knew it was useless to attempt to dissuade him, and set out for the glade. Joe ran back to the spring. Ignoring the possibility of the outlaw's return, he placed his weapons to one side, leaped into the water and began throwing out the pouches. There were twenty of them, and each held half a dozen ounces of dust. Obviously the treasure hoard of Denham had been greatly exaggerated, or else the dead man had drawn heavily on the store for his gambling.

Had the trapper been interested in gold

he would then and there have planned to use the influence of Laramie Pete on Left Hand to learn where the Indians secured the dust. Such a thought never entered his mind, however, as he climbed from the spring and wrung the water from his trousers.

He tied the pouches up in his hunting-shirt, and, carrying the improvised bag in one hand, he trailed the rifle in the other and started to find Reason. The latter, eager to get away from the spot, had moved rapidly, but had left signs at regular intervals which the trapper could read on the run.

"What's in that bundle?" suspiciously demanded Reason as his friend came up with him.

"Little weddin' present from ye 'n' me for th' gal."

"Ye've been in water up to yer waist. Yer present will fetch her bad luck."

"Not after she's swapped it for twenty-dollar gold-pieces. If no bad luck has already hit her——"

"It has," Reason gloomily interrupted. "Had a look at my snakeskin while I was waitin' for ye. Lost all its shine. Jest dull an' mis'rable-lookin'."

"Then we'd better be humpin' to Cherry Crick to fetch th' shine back by makin' everything all right for th' gal."

CHAPTER XII

THE THREE DEAD MEN

AN HOUR after dawn the trappers rode into Denver. Their first view of the straggling settlement along the dry creek would have told them that something out of the ordinary had happened even though they had not been forewarned.

The tent by the cottonwoods was closed to business, as was shown by the bowed figure of Old Missouri seated in front of the bar with a rifle across his knees.

Several men drinking Taos lightning at the brush shed conveyed the suggestion of having made a night of it; rather, of having made several nights of it. They drank not as convivial fellows, but tossed off their fiery drams in a gloomy, preoccupied manner. There was no congeniality in the group; no vacuous laughter and loud talk.

Each man carried arms and was deeply concerned with his own thoughts. Each filled his dipper without calling on his mates to drink with him. Newcomers took their places at the bar without the usual exchange of greetings. These last invariably showed signs of hard travel.

California Joe crowded the Arapaho war-pony close to the bar and demanded—

"What's th' row?"

The drink-vendor, recognizing him as a friend of Laramie Pete, scowled at him and might not have answered had not the trapper's gaze contained the quality of insistence.

"Gal stole," the man grunted, turning away to serve fresh customers.

"Trader Pete's girl stolen three days ago," volunteered another, working his way to the pony.

At first Joe did not know him because of the grime and dust caking his face and person.

"Ye're Durgin, eh?" he asked. "Gal's been stole, eh?"

"I'm Durgin. What's left of me after the last twenty-four hours' work. Yes, the girl's gone. She went to the Arapaho village just as the war party against the Utes started out. That was the last seen of her."

"Who took her?"

Durgin shook his head dejectedly. The man called Rogers spoke up and informed them:

"We sorter cal'late that th' 'Rapahoes took her as a war medicine. Who else could?"

"They wouldn't take her for a war medicine," growled Reason.

"How d' ye know that much?" querulously cried Bandy Benton. "They go into th' mountains an' have queer doin's. Some say they kill white women jest to make their —— war gods smile on 'em."

"Bah!" snorted California Joe. "Ye talk like fools. Th' Wolf Pawnee used to sometimes kill squaw prisoners to make their corn grow. 'Rapahoes don't do that, let alone killin' white women to make a war medicine. Why, Laramie Pete's gal is part 'Rapaho.

"If ye've been gunnin' for them Injuns ye've been wastin' yer time. They're off after th' Utes. Reason 'n' me met th' band down on Platte River Cañon an' they helped us fight off a gang o' Utes. I borrered this war-pony from Left Hand. They don't even know th' gal's missin'. Where's Old Oakes?"

"Don't know," Benton sullenly replied.

Durgin was more accommodating. He explained:

"His game's been closed ever since you quit us. He ain't been around. I see his crazy Injun walk through the town last night, carrying a long forked stick. Guess Oakes has lit out and shook him."

"I seen th' Injun on a sand-hill near sundown last night," called out a miner.

"Where's Laramie Pete and young Natchez?" asked Reason.

"Pete's knocked out with that hole through his arm that he got while you was with him at Hell-on-Wheels," said Durgin. "The night the girl was stolen young Natchez started for the Indian village to find her; and he run into a bunch of horsemen in the dark and went down with a knife in his side.

"He met 'em in the hills just outside the village. Couldn't see nothing. He yelled out his name and asked who they was; and they rode over him. And one of them leaned from the saddle and give him a dig that nearly let his life out."

"Half-Mask and his men," said Reason.

Durgin rubbed his head dubiously. Bandy Benton insisted—

"We've all been opinin' it was a parcel o' Injuns."

"It was Half-Mask," Joe tersely assured. "Tommy an' me had a runnin' fight with him."

"He chased you?" gasped Durgin. "Where? When?"

"Naw; we chased him," corrected Joe in an ugly voice. "Down Platte River Cañon way. He give us the slip, but first he bawled out to us 'bout th' gal bein' stole. We come through flyin', hopin' it was a lie, told to git us to quit trailin' him. Seems it's true. Looks like ye fellers had been huntin' for signs pretty hard."

"We've rid night 'n' day, doin' our dernedest," sighed Bandy Benton. "She must 'a' been carried off up beyond Clear Crick Cañon way."

Joe backed his pony from the crowd, and said:

"Take it easy till I make a call on Laramie Pete. Half-Mask stole th' gal. We're goin' after him. Chances are he's 'fraid o' bein' hard pushed an' plans to hold Miss June as a hostage. If he gits in a corner we'd have to let him go to git her back."

"If we git him in a corner I suspect some one will fill him full of holes," gritted Durgin.

"Gal's safety comes first," snarled Reason. "Let every man remember that. If ye didn't have guts 'nough to corner him till we come along, ye sartainly can hold off till we git th' gal back."

"Ye talk like ye was red pepper," growled Bandy Benton.

"I'm worse'n that. I'm rank pizen," said Reason.

"I don't ride in any gang that ye ride in," passionately declared Benton.

"Good for ye, Bandy!" cried the liquor-dealer.

Reason was afoot almost as soon as the words were said. His broad shoulders sent two men reeling in opposite directions, and he leaned his chest against the bar and softly demanded—

"What's them words, ye jug skunk?"

The proprietor had one hand on a pistol on the shelf under the counter. Reason stood with his empty hands on the bar. The proprietor started to pull the pistol above the bar. Instantly two terrible hands had him by the throat and Reason was whispering—

"Drop it!"

The pistol fell to the ground.

"Now what was them words ye said?" insisted Reason.

"I was sayin' it was time to have a drink on me, all hands," choked out the proprietor.

"Time to be goin', Tommy," called out California Joe, who had watched the situation carefully with one hand on his hip.

REASON released the man and leaped on to his horse. As they galloped away for the wagons they beheld Parson Kitts running toward them from the creek. He was shouting unintelligibly and waving his hands for them to stop. They reined in and as he came up to them they saw that like his fellow townsmen he showed signs of hard travel.

"Been hoping you two would come in," he greeted. "Come over to my shack and have a war talk. Everything in this town is at sixes and sevens. We need some system to this business. Of course you've heard the news?"

"Laramie Pete's gal is gone," laconically replied Reason.

"Stolen by Half-Mask or some of his

men," continued Kitts. "Some of those idiots at the drinking-shack think the Arapahoes did it. It's only by the hardest kind of work that I stopped a rush on their village."

"If ye hadn't stopped 'em we'd had a war started that would 'a' fetched in every tribe on th' plains; an' that would 'a' meant a good many years afore any more gold could be dug in th' Rockies," Joe grimly remarked.

"No one found any signs?" asked Reason.

Kitts threw out his hands in disgust.

"Just rode around the country like blind men. If there was any trail it's been blotted out, I'm afraid. Some of the Cherokees went out to find the trail, but they were fired upon by our men, who shot at the movement of any bush or tree. The Cherokees wouldn't separate from the crowd after that, and so we lost their service.

"Why, the boys have spent enough energy to round up every rascal in the Rockies. Last night some of the Auraria men exchanged shots with the Denver men; and night riding is out of favor.

"I want you two to come to my shack and help lay out a campaign that's got some system to it. I'm depending on you two to find the trail. The Cherokees are afraid to leave the crowd. And you will have to cut loose and travel far before you hit on any signs, I'm afraid."

"We'll be with ye jest as soon as I've seen an' talked with Laramie Pete an' young Natchez," promised Joe.

With this understanding the trappers set out to interview the trader. On striking the edge of the sand-waste they were again halted, only this time it was their curiosity that held them up. They had rounded a low hill, the sand muffling their horses' hoofs, when the peculiar actions of an Indian challenged their attention. A glance showed that he was no Arapaho.

He was seated with his back to them and deeply engrossed on some task. As they drew nearer Joe whispered to Reason that it was the Pit River Indian; and he glanced sharply about, expecting to behold Old Oakes. The Indian was alone, however.

He was squatting on his heels in a little hollow, and he had not seen nor heard them. They sat motionless on their horses and watched him.

He was crouching before a shallow basket such as the Indians make from withes or strong grasses. By his side was a long forked pole. The Indian was addressing the basket, his jumble of words being too hurried to be interpreted even had the trappers understood his language.

Finishing his recital, he leaped to his feet and picked up the pole. From beside the basket he picked up a short stick or stake and forced it deep into the sand. Having done this, he extended the forked end of the pole and carefully raised the lid of the basket.

Reason breathed heavily as the malignant triangle of a rattlesnake's head shot through the opening. It wavered back and forth for a moment, then with sinister undulations the yellow body with its smudges of chestnut brown flowed from the basket to the warm sand and coiled for battle.

Joe reached for his revolver, the mottled reptile filling him with race memories of terrible resentment. Reason, his snake medicine in mind, caught his friend's wrist and with a pressure signed for him to remain inactive.

The Indian moved slowly about the snake. The snake, with head reared, never took its basilisk gaze from the man.

As the Indian completed his circle he picked up a length of rawhide, one end of which ended in a slip-noose. Satisfied with the condition of the noose, he suddenly darted forward and with the forked end of the pole pinned the snake to the ground, catching it ten or twelve inches back of the neck.

Ignoring the rattler's violent twistings and convolutions, the Indian leaned against the pole and softly applauded the frantic efforts of his captive to strike. Finally tiring of this, he dropped the noose over the head and allowed it to fall back as far as the pole before tightening it. Next he loosened the pressure of the pole and began drawing the snake through the forked end until he could pass the free end of the rawhide around the upright stick and make it fast. This accomplished, he withdrew the pole and leaped back.

The snake coiled about the stake and writhed convulsively to escape the pressure of the noose. The Indian squatted before it and made hideous faces and threw sand into the wide mouth until the serpent was aroused to its highest pitch of fury.

Opening a pouch, the Indian produced a

piece of deer's liver and with a short length of cord tied it to the end of his bow. Holding the bow at arm's length, he dangled the meat before the snake. There was a bewildering flash of the vicious head forward and back. Reason hoarsely whispered—

"Struck it twice!"

The Indian gingerly examined the meat and after a few moments repeated the maneuver. It was not until then that he lifted his eyes and beheld the horsemen. Except for one brief yet intense glance he paid no attention to them, but proceeded with his sport of teasing the rattler.

For several minutes the trappers watched the gruesome sport. The Indian, naked except for his breech-clout, his body daubed in spots with earth of a muddy color, somehow suggested the repulsive, mottled body of the snake.

Nor was the serpent's implacable ferocity of eye entirely lacking from the small orbs of the red man. As the cruel head, nearly bisected by the hideous mouth, darted forward to inject the deadly venom in the bait, the thin lips of the Indian parted and showed his teeth in a similar bestiality of purpose.

"I can't stand that," growled Joe.

And, shaking off Reason's hand, he whipped out his revolver, and, waiting until the Indian settled back on his haunches, fired and sent the rattler's head spinning from the horrible body. The Indian leaped to his feet and hurriedly wrapped the piece of meat in a fragment of deerskin.

California Joe accosted him in Kiowa, then in Arapaho. If the Pit River man understood either tongue he gave no sign.

"Ask him where his coup-stick is," suggested Reason.

Joe pulled out his knife and with his rifle-stock gave a pantomime of cutting notches. The Indian watched him stolidly for a few moments; then snatched a short stick from the sand and triumphantly held it up for the white men to view. He gently rubbed his fingers over its smooth surface to call attention to the fact that the bark had been removed. It was a willow wand and there were no notches on it.

Around his head the Indian wore a strip of soiled cloth to hold in place a dressing of leaves. Joe pointed to it. The Indian caressed it gently, then gave voice to a guttural howl and extended both arms toward the sun.

"Head gittin' well. Thankin' th' sun medicine," murmured Reason.

"Reckon he ain't so crazy as he was," mused Joe. "Reckon he must be rememberin' things 'bout his fambly that Old Oakes an' his friends wiped out."

"Which bein' so I reckon Oakes is jest as safe as Half-Mask as he would be with this feller on his trail," added Reason.

Hurling the forked stick to one side and throwing the basket after it, the Indian started off on a lope, making to pass around the town on the north. The trappers rode on.

They were several hundred feet from the wagons when they caught the sound of voices. Joe's face drew down in sympathy. In a hysteria of grief father and lover were calling out the name of the missing girl. Laramie Pete, using his native language, repeated the virtues of his daughter in a shrill singsong, and mourned her as one already dead. Young Natchez, inside one of the wagons, kept shrieking:

"June! June! Come back to me, June!"

Over and over he yelled this supplication.

"——! I can't stand this!" gritted Reason. "Let's git ahead an' have it over with an' git back to chasin' that devil."

He whipped his horse into a gallop and the two raced in among the wagons.

THEY found Laramie seated on a robe near a smoldering fire, his arm in a sling, his pale face haggard and worn and his eyes wild with fever. On recognizing his friends he screamed:

"*Ma petite! Ma petite!*"

"We're goin' to fetch her back," soothed Joe as he dismounted. "Now, Laramie, stop that cat-waulin' an' listen to me. Th' little gal ain't been hurt none. Half-Mask an' his men stole her to have a strong card to play if they ever git cornered. They want somethin' to trade for their liberty if we ever git th' drop on 'em. They'll be mighty careful she don't git misused any."

"June! June! Come back to me, June!" called Natchez from a wagon.

Joe lifted the cover and found Natchez stretched on a bundle of blankets. His face was flushed with the fire of a high fever. The stained bandage on his side had been torn from its place. The trapper rapidly examined the wound, with Natchez paying no attention to him. The assassin's knife had been deflected to one side by the ribs and the hurt need not of itself be

dangerous if infection could be prevented.

"Start up that fire under th' kettle, Tommy, so's I can have some b'iled water," directed Joe.

After the fire was well under way and steam began rising from the kettle Joe requested:

"Go find some 'Rapaho women. Tell 'em 'bout this sick man. Have 'em send some one that can doctor him. We don't want no mystery man, but a grass-root man. Some o' th' squaws can do it."

Glad to be doing something, Reason departed on his errand. By the time Joe had improvised a new bandage and had washed the wound with boiled water his friend returned with a wrinkled-face Indian woman riding behind him. She gave one glance at the sick man and then turned to the kettle.

From a bag she produced some green leaves and a small package of roots. She called for another kettle, and while Joe was procuring one from the trader's stock she made a poultice of the leaves and deftly applied it to the wound. Pouring a small quantity of water into a second kettle, she set the roots to steeping, and then transferred her attention to Laramie Pete, examining his arm and satisfying herself that the splints were in the proper position.

In Arapaho she murmured to the trader: "Poison runs in the white man's flesh. He poisons himself with fear. Be still and sleep."

The trader ceased his moaning and replied:

"My little daughter! I left her for the Arapahoes, her people, to watch over. They went to sleep and let her be stolen."

"She will be brought back unhurt," was the guttural reply. "We have made medicine to bring her back. She has Arapaho blood in her heart. It is very little and weak, but it is enough to answer our medicine.

"Our medicine calls to her red blood. She will come. Be still. Sleep, that you may be strong to sing and dance when she comes back."

Leaving him, she tested the contents of the kettle, poured some of the brew into a tin dipper and forced Natchez to drink it almost scalding hot by the simple process of cradling his head in the hollow of her left arm and forcing his jaws apart with her right hand while Joe poured the decoction into his gaping mouth. Half-strangled by the brusk treatment, Natchez ceased his monotonous plaint.

The squaw turned on the trappers and harshly commanded—

"Go!"

"Reckon we might as well," meekly agreed Joe. "Leave yer nag, Tommy, an' take one o' Laramie's."

He set the example by shifting his saddle from Left Hand's pony to one of the trader's.

In changing his saddle Reason paused long enough to produce his snakeskin and hold it in his hands. He was struggling against selfishness. Self-preservation urged him to carry his medicine with him; but the wounded man needed its aid. Finally he conquered self. With a lugubrious sigh he hung the skin over a wagon-wheel. His sacrifice was not to be, however, for the squaw snatched it from the wheel and threw it at him.

"That settles their hash," Reason bitterly lamented as he picked up his medicine. "She's killed both o' them. Ye can't cuff a snakeskin round like that an' not suffer for it."

THEIR fresh mounts carried the trappers to the town at a wild pace, and they did not halt until they reached Kitts' shack. This was located in the dry bed of the creek.

As the two dismounted they observed men leaving the settlement while others were coming in. There was much bawling back and forth of worthless information, of false clues and wild rumors.

Old Missouri, still lacking orders to open his employer's bar, guarded the stock of whisky and sent all the thirsty down the line to where the dealer in Taos lightning was reaping a small fortune. Hardly had the trappers struck the ground before Kitts was inviting them:

"Come in. I was about to start looking for you."

He was oiling a revolver. A rifle and bowie-knife on top of a saddle indicated that he was about to ride. Before they could explain the conditions they had found at the wagons he was rapidly saying:

"We need system. Every one is running around like wild men. We must organize several parties and have each follow a definite plan of search.

"I want you fellers to head two parties.

Too many men are getting in each other's way. We want fewer men—men we can depend on."

"We're waiting to start," said Joe. "Four or five men in each band is 'nough."

"Where's Old Oakes?" asked Reason.

"Ain't seen him for several days. Probably at Hell-on-Wheels."

"We seen Half-Mask down Platte River Cañon way. Swapped lead with him an' drew blood," said Reason.

"I'll be cussed!" exclaimed Kitts. "Reckon I'd better let you two do some talking and stop trying to say everything myself."

"Half-Mask has got white ha'r," grimly added Joe.

Kitts dropped his revolver and stared at the trappers with an air of amazement.

"Good Heavens! You mean——"

"I mean we hanker to know where Old Oakes has been durin' th' last few days," Joe quietly answered. "We don't say he's th' only white-headed man round these parts, but he's th' only one we've seen. He's a pizen pup, even if he does deal a square game.

"When Half-Mask rode away from us he lost his hat. We seen his ha'r. White, like Oakes. I figger we three better light out for Hell-on-Wheels with orders for th' rest o' th' boys to chase along after us.

"After we've looked Oakes up at th' wagons—if he's there—Tom 'n' me will take a few men an' strike for Clear Crick Cañon an' th' cañon o' th' Platte. Them's th' two most likely places for Half-Mask to hide up in, or hide th' gal in.

"Durgin seems a cool-headed feller. Better have him come along."

"If there's a chance of Oakes being our man we three may wind up this business before the boys can overtake us," said Kitts, belting on his weapons and shouldering his saddle. "I'll get my horse and leave word for Durgin to pick a dozen good men and follow us."

AFTER Kitts had talked with Durgin and rejoined the trappers on the western edge of the town Joe briefly narrated his and Reason's experiences in the cañon and at the sacred spring. Kitts swore softly.

"Anyway th' fellers needn't spend no more time huntin' for Lucky Denham's gold-mine," said Joe. "I packed 'bout a hundred an' twenty ounces o' dust in with me an' threw it into one o' Laramie's wagons. Tommy an' me want to give it to th' gal when she gits married."

"You say he told you that the girl had been stolen? Did you recognize his voice?" Kitts eagerly inquired.

"Voice sounded rough. Like a man that didn't have much book-l'arnin'. Old Oakes is as full o' tricks as th' devil. He could change his voice as easy as he can change th' cards after ye've cut 'em."

"Near as I can figger," spoke up Reason, "th' gal must 'a' reached th' 'Rapaho village jest as Left Hand's band was takin' their path ag'in' th' Utes. Perhaps she hadn't entered th' village. If she had, she hadn't gone by more'n a lodge or two. All th' Injuns was bunched together on t'other side to see their men start off.

"Half-Mask, or some of his men, was hidin' in th' sand-hills an' seen her, an' made a rush an' picked her up an' flung her across a pony. Then young Natchez comes along an' gets rode down an' knifed."

"That sounds like sense," slowly agreed Kitts. "It was after sundown when Left Hand started. In the darkness it would be easy for a small band of horsemen to ride from the Indian village and not be noticed by the miners. They'd be mistaken for Arapahoes hurrying to overtake the war party. In fact, I'll bet they followed close behind Left Hand.

"But this is a puzzler: If the Mask had his gang with him I don't understand how you fellows dodged them. Why didn't they take a hand when you were chasing the Mask? They could have laid for you easy."

Joe combed his beard thoughtfully, then suggested:

"Reckon th' Mask knew 'bout th' spring an' th' gold dust, or had a notion 'bout it. Reckon he hid th' gal an' then shook th' gang an' went alone to clean up."

"I believe you've hit it dead center. Now when we get near Hell-on-Wheels we'd better leave our horses and scout ahead on foot. If Oakes is there we must jump him, or he'll take some of us along with him. If he's the Mask we mustn't give him any more show than as if he was a rattlesnake."

"Jump him but take him alive so's we can find out where th' gal is hid," shrewdly warned Reason.

"That's th' idee!" cried Joe. "Tommy,

ye've got a good head under that long ha'r. Speakin' o' rattlesnakes makes me think o' what Tom 'n' me seen when we was ridin' out to visit Laramie."

And the trapper proceeded to describe the Pit River Indian and his maneuvers with the rattler.

After he had finished Kitts informed the two:

"The Indian has been acting mighty queer since Oakes shot him. Bullet glanced off his tough skull. He's quit his infernal whittling for one thing, and he won't come to town nights.

"I'd supposed Oakes was staying away because he couldn't get the Indian to come with him. Oakes calls him his 'luck.' He'd never deal unless the Indian sat near him. Gamblers have queer notions, you know.

"But that bullet either made the Indian more crazy, or cured him. I don't know which."

"I'll bet it cured him," said Joe. "An' I wouldn't be in Old Oakes' shoes for a Rocky Mountain range o' pure gold dust unless I could know th' Injun was well planted underground."

For half a mile Kitts rode with head bowed, pondering on some phase of the girl's disappearance that puzzled him. When they sighted a wisp of smoke over the wagons he halted and advised them:

"You can do as you want to, but seeing Oakes is your enemy and may shoot on sight, I think you'd better let me go ahead and get him to talking. He won't suspect me, and I'll jump him and you can rush in and help tie him up."

The trappers rapidly agreed, and the three horses were hobbled behind some cottonwoods. Kitts advanced openly on the wagons, while Joe and Reason swung to one side and took advantage of each bit of cover.

IN FRONT of the brush shelter inside of the circle of wagons Old Oakes was frying bacon over a small fire. The others of the little colony were either absent in Denver, absorbing the excitement caused by the kidnaping of June La Blanche, or else were out in the wilds searching for the girl.

Oakes had the walled camp to himself; for even the Pit River Indian was absent. But although alone the gambler's blue eyes were constantly searching the wagons and stone barricade as he cooked his bacon, and his ears were alert to catch some suspicious sound.

His sixth sense was warning him to stand on guard, clamoring to him of a lurking danger he could not see nor hear. Many times when dealing his game he had had the same presentiment, when some one of the gamesters at his board were bent on making trouble. He boasted that he could always detect a trouble-maker before a bet was placed, a word spoken, or a card exposed.

Now that feeling of unrest, that atmosphere of peril, was closing about him. He knew he was alone except as the Indian might be somewhere near the wagons. Yet he could not rid himself of the notion that malignant eyes were watching him.

He told himself that the notion was absurd; it persisted, however. He was determined to shake it off, but even so he kept one hand on the butt of his Crimea revolver as the other turned the bacon, nor did his eyes bother to follow his culinary task.

The Indian's attitude of late had puzzled him, although it failed to concern him except as it had held up his game at the Cherry Creek settlement. The redskin's refusal to go to the gaming-shack had angered him, and at times he wished that the bullet from his gun had slain instead of stunning the poor wretch.

In his resentment at the fellow's stubborn refusal to go to Denver evenings he could have killed him offhand if it were not for his superstitious belief that the man was his luck. How strongly this idea dominated him was shown by his unwillingness to open his game unless the Indian was present. Ever since the Indian had sat beside him he had invariably won. He attributed to the Pit River man even his escape from the Kiowa camp.

Suddenly the solitude of the place was broken by a harsh, guttural voice raised in a chant. He dropped the frying-pan and its contents into the fire and stood erect, his blue eyes scowling. It was the Pit River man singing to his tribal god. Thus, perhaps, he had sung before the white men's bullets in the valley of the Sacramento had jumbled his brains and left him little better than an idiot.

With frowning brows the gambler listened, one hand on his revolver. Since

being shot down outside the barrier the Indian had spoken no word, nor had he cut any notches on his coup-stick. His abandonment of the last practise had been a distinct relief to Oakes.

But now the Indian was invoking the Great Master—the sun—to aid him on a war-path. Still crazy; for where would he lay down a war-path now that the bristling backbone of a continent separated him from both friend and foe?

This last thought caused Oakes' fingers to relax and drop away from his revolver. The red man had been his luck because he was demented. The discovery that the fellow's mind was still hopelessly clouded came as a great relief.

As to there being any significance to his war-song, Oakes did not fear it for a moment. Had the Indian not insanely cut notches in innumerable coup-sticks without attempting to count a coup? The very inconsistency of the man's behavior was the strongest proof of his insanity.

Cautiously moving to the western wall of the camp, Oakes peered over the rocks and beheld his protégé seated with his back to the wagons. The Indian was entirely naked. As he sang he caressed his bow of cedar, the same bow he had brought from his mountain home to the valley of the Sacramento and from the Sacramento to these new diggings under the eastern eaves of the Rockies. It was a superior bow, being as graceful in lines as it was effective in hurling the long reed arrows.

As Oakes watched, the Indian laid aside the bow and held up the arrows, a half-dozen of them, and examined them one by one, addressing each in a jargon that had no meaning to the watcher. Sticking all the arrows but one into the ground, the Indian produced from between his feet a fragment of quartz and held it up to the sun, his song sinking to a whisper. Next he picked from the ground a piece of bone, one end of which was semi-spherical and marked by a shallow crease.

Now the song was like the murmuring of the wind through the mountain pines when there are many secrets to be told. The hurried insistence of it affected the gambler more disagreeably than had the loudly shouted war-song. It smacked of stealth, of the padded softness of a mountain cat sure of its prey.

Holding the piece of bone in one hand and the quartz in the other, the Pit River man began shaping an arrowhead from the latter. His fingers flew with incredible rapidity.

His cunning at the task would have nonplused a white artizan. For by sheer strength of his hands and aided by the crease in the bone, with no leverage whatever, he quickly broke the edges of the quartz until he had an arrowhead that was well balanced, beautiful of lines and sharp of point. Not once had he struck the quartz a blow in reducing it to the required form and size.

He held the finished product up to the sun and shouted that it was a good arrowhead and very thirsty. Contented with his workmanship, he proceeded deftly to make it fast to the reed shaft.

The arrow was now completed. Oakes commented:

"Making a medicine arrow. War-song just a part of the ceremony."

The Indian quickly faced the wagons, and for a moment Oakes believed that he had heard the words uttered beneath the breath. He did not dwell on this phenomenon as he was now observing that the man's cheeks and forehead were black.

"That's why he's been carrying that can of tar around with him," muttered the gambler. "He's gone into mourning. But it can't be for his root-digging family, for he's crazy."

Had the gambler remained on watch a bit longer he might have been deeply interested in witnessing the rest of the Indian's maneuvers. For as the red man resumed singing in a loud voice he stood erect and held the new arrow up to the sun, and then, bending low, stabbed it viciously into a black piece of meat, the liver of a deer. And with each thrust he grunted exultingly and stamped his bare feet smartly.

But Oakes was now back by the fire, ruefully surveying the frying-pan and the charred shreds of the bacon. Lifting his voice, he sternly called on the Pit River man to bring him dry fuel and be quick about it. The war-song ceased abruptly, and the Indian's bare feet pattered up to the wall.

OAKES stared into the tar-bedaubed face, and, pointing to the dying fire, repeated his command. With great alacrity the Indian ran to the

nearest clump of cottonwoods and collected an armful of dead branches.

Oakes was much pleased with the fellow's ready obedience and cut extra slices of bacon, thinking to reward him and humor him, thereby inducing him to take his place in the gaming-shack that night. The Indian was slow in returning, however, and the gambler's patience was exhausted when at last he scaled the wall, his arms heaped with wood, and stared stupidly at the white man.

"You dog," growled Oakes, "make this fire new. Tonight you go with me to the white man's village."

"White men make me afraid," the Indian said with a shiver, advancing only a step or two and then coming to a halt.

"You'll go with me or I'll send your spirit after the sun."

The Indian came on another step and muttered:

"It is bad to go out there alone. Spirits whisper to me how my people wait for me and keep asking why I stayed behind them."

Oakes eyed him narrowly.

"Then your people are dead?" he asked.

"The white man should know. He and his friends killed them—killed them all."

"Your head has been sick. How long have you known about your people being dead?" quietly asked Oakes, his hand dropping to his revolver.

He feared that he could never use the red man as his luck again.

"When I woke up some sleeps ago. When I put my hand to my head and found it was hurt."

"Then you remembered?"

"There were my people all on the ground, dead. There were white men with the little bags of yellow rock-dust we had brought down from the mountains."

"You saw me there?"

"You were there. You had a bang-stick in your hand. You fired it in my face."

"Bring that wood here and then go and stand on the wall."

The Indian meekly advanced, but some of the branches fell from his arms. He stooped to gather them up, and Oakes, never suspecting the trick, was astounded to behold the bow and new arrow among the dead sticks on the ground. In a flash he realized the man's cunning in utilizing his errand for firewood as a means of closing in with his bow and arrow.

"—— you!" yelled Oakes. "That game won't work."

As he spoke he yanked out his revolver and fired just as the Indian was setting the arrow on the cord. The Indian crumpled up, falling on his knees; but already the arrow was in place. He was dying, yet his strength was sufficient for him to pull the cord a trifle and release the shaft.

Oakes grinned wolfishly as he watched this last desperate attempt at revenge. The arrow rose a dozen feet into the air and curved lazily downward. There was no force behind it. It moved so gently that the gambler could have caught it in his hand.

It would have struck the ground near his foot had he not derisively thrown out his hand to knock it aside. The needle point of the quartz scratched his wrist and brought blood. Snarling an oath at the smart of the slight wound, the gambler sprang toward his victim, the devil unloosed within him.

"You red hound! I helped to pot your whole family! I've used you for my luck and you've won more than one pot for me. Now I'm through with you, you red vermin."

He lifted his revolver and fired twice into the helpless form. He would have emptied his gun had it not been for the peculiar facial expression of the red man.

The man was dying fast, and yet he was actually smiling. Not the sardonical smile resulting from convulsed muscles, but the smile of deep content. The eyes, too, registered a mighty satisfaction.

Oakes' rage faltered before the impact of the dying man's mocking gaze. He thrust his revolver back into his belt. The next moment he was snatching it out, for a calm voice was asking—

"Been doing a little murder to keep your spirits up?"

Facing Kitts, he curtly explained:

"That red devil tried to wipe me out. See my wrist? Tried to sneak close with his —— bow and arrow. Had them in an armful of cottonwood branches. Nearly got me at that. He never fired that arrow after I plugged him. It was self-defense. I don't like your calling it murder."

He had his hand resting on his revolver as he spoke, and despite the moderation of his speech his eyes flamed baleful warnings.

Kitts nodded and apologized:

"I spoke too quick. I can see the man must have attacked you first. Of course we whites don't make much fuss over a dead Indian anyway. But to pop them off without cause is bad policy. It might mean their wiping out the settlement. Some one has to pay some time."

"He tried to get me and I got him, the red hound," gritted Oakes, removing his hand from his gun.

Kitts picked up the arrow and after the first glance handled it gingerly. The head formed from quartz interested him for several moments. Oakes was watching him, his eyes closed to mere slits.

He noted the extreme cauiton with which Kitts held the reed shaft. With an uneasy laugh the gambler remarked—

"One would think there was some —— poison on the thing the way you hold it."

"I think there is," slowly answered Kitts, letting the arrow fall to the ground. "I saw him just as you called to him to bring the wood. He was stabbing something on the ground. I thought he was killing something. They usually use a piece of meat that's been poisoned by a rattlesnake's bite.

"I think he got you, Oakes. Even now he may be waiting for you to overtake him. Does your arm feel queer? Looks like it was swelling a bit."

CALIFORNIA JOE and Reason could hear the two men talking as they crept up to the stone wall. Then a revolver-shot brought them to their feet and sent them running through the opening, their guns raised.

They came to a plunging halt as they beheld the gambler on the ground and Kitts standing over him.

"Thought ye planned to take him alive?" angrily cried Joe.

"We was goin' to make him tell where th' gal is," rebuked Reason.

"Bless you, friends, I didn't kill him. I wouldn't be idiot enough to do that so long as the girl is missing," defended Kitts. "My guns haven't been out of my belt."

"Then he killed hisself!" gasped Joe.

"Helped by the Indian," corrected Kitts, pointing to the red man. "Seems the Indian recovered his memory after Oakes creased his head with a bullet a few days ago. Seems he had a grudge against Oakes——"

"Oakes an' his gang wiped out th' red's whole fambly to git some gold dust," interrupted Joe.

"—and he shot him with a poisoned arrow. The second Oakes knew he was poisoned he yanked out his gun and before I could stop him he shot himself."

"We saw that redskin makin' th' poison," Reason informed Kitts with a shiver. "We didn't guess who he meant it for.

"Some folks say th' snake ain't big medicine. Even th' Kiowas don't believe in it. But what other critter is there that can spit death?"

Kitts remained staring down on the dead gambler. The right arm was slightly swollen, showing the rapid effect of the venom. The right hand still clutched the Crimea revolver.

"The Indian has spoiled our plans," Kitts regretted. "I'd expected to take Oakes alive and make him tell where we could find the girl. I was even ready to turn him loose if she was returned to us. But now he's gone, and the girl's gone, and we're up a stump."

Joe would not agree with the last, his natural optimism finding a hole through the darkest clouds.

"There's some o' th' gang left," he reminded Kitts. "They know where th' gal is. Prob'ly some o' them is standin' guard over her. I'll start at once for th' Platte River Cañon. Tommy can strike for th' Clear Crick Cañon. We're bound to find her. What's yer snake medicine say, Tommy?"

Reason sighed dolefully and replied:

"Th' snake medicine ain't workin' very strong. Reckon that dead Injun's snake medicine was stronger'n mine. Then ag'in it didn't help my medicine any to have that 'Rapaho squaw go heavin' it round. But I'm off for Clear Crick. Where's th' men?"

Kitts ran to the wall, jumped up on it and examined the country toward Denver. He waved his hat and motioned with his arm for some one to make haste. Turning to the trappers, he announced:

"They're coming. Durgin lost no time."

The trappers ran through the opening and in a few moments beheld a party of horsemen advancing. Following Kitts, they recovered their horses and were ready to ride when the posse rode up.

California Joe spoke first, saying:

"For my work I only want a few men.

Four besides myself will be 'nough. They must ride mighty good hosses. I'll take Durgin an' leave it to him to pick three others."

"Then I'll pick Rogers, Bandy Benton and Mason," the New Englander promptly decided.

"Kitts an' me won't want more'n four men," said Reason. "I'll leave it to him to name 'em."

Kitts quickly made his choice, and as the four men rode to one side he advised:

"The rest of you had better scour the country between the Platte and Clear Crick. If you come on any of Half-Mask's gang and they offer to swap the girl for a chance to get away, make the bargain and stick to it. What we want is Miss La Blanche. Now their leader is gone——"

"How gone? Gone where?" exclaimed Durgin.

Kitts pointed to the wagons, explaining how Old Oakes had met his death. In silence the men dismounted, filed through the opening and gazed in horror at the loathsome spectacle. Under California Joe's directions a single grave was dug outside the wagons, and there the red man and the white man were buried together.

As they took to horse Bandy Benton complained—

"We could worry along without th' Injun, but we sartainly will miss Oakes' faro game."

Durgin held back long enough to look through the wagons for some of the dead man's loot, but found nothing except the ordinary belongings of the miners. With a wave of the hand Joe led his men toward the cañon. After issuing a few final orders to the men who were to work the country between the two cañons, Kitts and Reason struck out for Clear Creek.

Fifteen miles were covered before darkness forced California Joe and his men to halt. He had retraced as nearly as possible his and Reason's route from the medicine spring. They dismounted and cared for their horses while Rogers and Benton collected fuel.

The last named had been at his task for only a few minutes when he raised a shout. Joe sternly commanded him to be silent. But while he stilled the man's tongue he could not suppress his exultation; for Rogers had made an important discovery, the first since the search was commenced. It was a red ribbon, just like the one Miss June had worn on her hair. Rogers had found it hanging on a bush.

"She left it there to give us a hint," declared Rogers.

After turning it over in his mind Joe nodded his head, agreeing:

"They stole her on th' edge o' evenin'. They had time to push through this far before light, seein' as how they knew th' trail. Yep; th' time fits in all right. If they'd took her in th' daytime they'd passed this place before night, an' I'd look cross-eyed at any such signs, bein' afraid it was a game to fool us. She never could leave a bright-colored piece o' ribbon on a bush in daylight without bein' caught at it; for men was ridin' on each side of her an' behind her."

Rogers' find threw the camp into a flutter of excitement. The men believed that they were on the right trail and were consequently in high spirits. They were inclined to make derisive remarks about their unfortunate friends wasting time on the Clear Creek route.

But grim tragedy, like the night, was descending on the camp to erase all exultation. If the ribbon was not sufficient token of the outlaws' presence California Joe was to secure absolute evidence when he laid aside his pipe and wandered from the small fire to see what had startled the horses.

The animals were picketed at one end of the glade containing the camp, and had displayed much uneasiness. Joe supposed that the cause of their alarm was nothing more serious than a cowardly mountain lion. On reaching the horses he soothed them with a few words but failed to discover anything. The stars shone brilliantly, and although there was no moon it was possible to make out shapes distinctly against the sky-line.

He knew that a mountain lion would retreat on catching the scent of a man; and yet the horses continued to display uneasiness even when he stroked their heads and whispered to them. What puzzled him was the fact that they were not aroused to the point where they would try to pull up their picket-pins and stampede. Yet they were troubled over something.

After quieting them a bit the trapper observed that they had drawn back from the cottonwoods the full length of their ropes

and were bunched together. Whatever disturbed them was in the woods.

Thinking that a mountain cat might be hiding there in the darkness, Joe pulled his revolver and made for the woods. A horse snorted in fear, as if warning him to be on his guard.

Cautiously advancing, and fully expecting at any moment to hear the ear-splitting scream of the cat, the trapper worked his way into the growth and attempted to glimpse the larger branches against the sparkling sky.

But it was not overhead that he was to make his find. It was at his feet, only he did not realize it until he had tripped over a yielding object and had almost fallen.

He leaped back and was aiming his revolver before he remembered that there had been no show of resistance on the part of the obstacle. Crouching low and holding his gun ready, he swept a hand before him and was astounded to find his fingers touching the haft of a knife. Apparently the knife was standing upright.

Beginning to understand, he felt about him and gathered some dry twigs, which he lighted with a storm match. As the tiny torch gained strength and increased the radius of its zone the trapper beheld the figure of a man lying face down, with a bowie-knife buried deep between his shoulder-blades. There was something familiar about the silent figure even in the uncertain light and with the features hidden from view. Advancing his light, the trapper gently lifted the head.

"——! Bandy Benton!" he huskily exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VENGEANCE OF THE THUNDER BIRDS

"IT'S awful!" shuddered Rogers after Joe had given the alarm and had extinguished the fire.

"Poor old Bandy!" whispered Mason. "Many th' drink I've bought him!"

"Bandy done for," mumbled Durgin. "If they can kill him within a few rods of our camp they'll be making a try for the rest of us. Perhaps we'd been wiser to have fetched along more men."

"We's fools to come out here only five strong!" bitterly declared Mason.

"Gawdfrey! I don't dodge a real fight, but when it's dark—" Rogers began.

Joe sharply reminded them:

"It's as dark for him or them as it is for us. Bandy's death was th' work o' one o' their scouts. Their hidin'-place is near here. There's only two or three of 'em or they'd 'a' bagged us all while we was sittin' round th' fire. We're still four men. That one man sneaked up on Bandy an' knifed him. If there'd been two of 'em they'd fired on us. This murderin' feller didn't dare risk bein' chased. We'll git 'em yet, an' inside o' twenty-four hours."

"That's the talk!" softly cried Durgin. "As soon as it gits light I'll take Mason and you take Rogers, and we'll separate and scout for them."

"I'll stand guard th' rest th' night," volunteered Rogers. "Lawd knows I ain't sleepy after *that*."

"I'll stay awake with ye," offered Mason. "Wouldn't dast close my eyes for a second."

"You fellers remember what Joe says; there's only two or three of them, and they haven't got enough sand to even fire on us from the bushes," Durgin reminded.

"It only takes one man to kill me if he catches me off my guard," muttered Rogers. "I ain't afraid of their whole gang if I can fight back. But th' dirty, murderin' snake——"

"Don't let any one go ramblin' round 'tween now an' daylight," broke in Mason's quavering voice. "For if I hear a sound I'm going to shoot."

"I'll take a chance o' yer hittin' me," said Joe. "I'm goin' to do a little scoutin' afore turnin' in. If ye hear me yer welcome to blaze away."

"If I went I'd git in your way," decided Durgin. "So I'll try to git some sleep. We can bury poor Bandy in the morning."

Joe scouted completely around the camp and satisfied himself that no foe was lurking in its vicinity. He returned to his companions and gained his blankets before either of the sentinels discovered his presence.

The rest of the night passed without alarm. Joe awoke to find Mason sleeping with his back against a rock. Rogers was standing erect and watching the woods beyond the horses. Durgin still slept.

"Thought I heard something down there," said Rogers.

"Why didn' ye go an' see what it was?"

Rogers shook his head and looked sheepish.

"I wouldn't go near that place where Bandy was done for except in broad daylight; no, not for a million dollars."

"It's growing light fast. Come on."

They investigated the patch of woods together but found nothing. At Joe's suggestion they buried the murdered man, digging a grave with their bowie-knives. On a cottonwood-tree near the grave California Joe laboriously carved the date with his knife and added:

BANDY BENTON KILLED BY A SKUNK.

This done, they returned to the fire and aroused Mason and Durgin and, after announcing that the victim had been decently interred, ate a hurried breakfast and discussed the day's campaign. Joe insisted that the girl and two or three of the gang were somewhere near. He advised his friends to be watchful against an ambush.

"They know there was five of us. They know now there's only four. Mebbe they opine one more killin' will send t'others skeddadlin' back to Cherry Crick."

"Shall we separate as I suggested last night, or go it all together?" asked Durgin.

"Dawg-gone! Keep together!" urged Rogers.

"'Low I've got my nerve back. Let's divide up," said Mason.

Joe pronounced in favor of separating.

"Rogers will go with me," he said. "We'll take Benton's nag along for th' gal to ride. I reckon we'll find her within three miles o' here, somewhere near th' Injun's medicine spring.

"See that mountain with th' scar on th' side? Durgin, ye an' Mason swing in a half-circle to th' west, then swing back an' meet us under th' scar. We'll be within two miles o' th' cañon wall then, an' within half a mile o' th' spring.

"If ye don't find me don't go lookin' for me. Jest sit down an' take it easy an' wait for me to find ye."

"Poor Bandy knew this country best of all of us," said Durgin. "Once he trailed Lucky Denham as far as this, then lost him."

"I can take ye through as well as anybody," declared Joe. "All ye two got to do is to keep that scar in sight till we come to a pine growth; then ye ride straight for it. Once ye strike timber an' find ye can't see th' scar no longer, that's when he should halt an' wait for me. Most likely I'll be there waitin' for ye."

With this understanding the two couples separated with Joe and Rogers taking the more direct course. Joe rode ahead, scanning the ground for signs of a fresh trail; but the nature of the soil made it a difficult task until they dipped down a slope and were almost in the shadow of the evergreen growth. Then the trapper dismounted and threw himself on the ground.

"Find something?" whispered Rogers.

"Three hosses passed here 'bout four days ago. Two rode ahead side by side, with th' off hoss crowdin' in. Man on near hoss must 'a' been leadin' t'other. T'other two come in Injun file."

"Then let's light out for this spring ye've been talkin' 'bout an' let's see if we can't find a fight," urged Rogers. "I want my play in th' daytime. No more night work for me."

"Jest keep yer ha'r on for a minute. Hold th' hosses while I look round for a sign o' Durgin an' Mason."

Discarding his rifle, the trapper swarmed up the trunk of a pine until from his position he could examine portions of the back country. Ridges of rock and occasional patches of timber broke up his view, and his only hope was to glimpse his companions in some one of the open spaces.

He knew that their détour could not have carried them more than a mile or two west of his course and that they must have swung back into his trail did they follow his instructions to keep the scar on the mountainside in sight.

He began with the farthermost ridge and swept his gaze up and down its rocky crest, then scrutinized a wedge of timber that ended at a stretch of ledge. He discovered no signs of life and shifted his search to his more immediate neighborhood, where two growths of pine were separated by a narrow opening.

As this was scarcely more than a lane and as his elevation was not sufficient to permit his more than glimpsing the farther side of it, he was giving it a perfunctory examination when his ear caught the faint explosion of a gun. The noise was so faint that Rogers, on the ground and shut in by the growth, failed to hear it. Joe tried to locate the direction of the alarm, and even fancied he heard yells.

Then into this nearest opening burst the

figure of a horseman. The rider was lying on the horse's withers and seemed to be strangely inert. The trapper's keen eyes had barely rested on this dramatic spectacle before the horseman, in approaching him, rode out of his field of vision. This disappearance was succeeded by the emergence of a second horseman from cover, who unlike the first rode erect. As Joe stared with mouth agape there came a puff of smoke and the belated sound of a rifle.

"Devils an' cactus!" yelled the trapper, sliding down the tree in frantic haste and throwing himself on to his horse. "Foller me, Rogers! Don't lose sight of me if ye want to live! Never mind Bandy's hoss!"

"I hear yellin'!" cried Rogers as Joe led the way toward the oncoming fugitive.

"Thought I heard it, too. But there's work ahead that ain't got any guesswork 'bout it," Joe called back over his shoulder.

THEY rode recklessly into a fringe of pine, bending low to escape being swept from the saddle by branches. Almost as soon as they sighted the opening beyond a horse was bearing down upon them. Joe swerved aside and grabbed at the bridle and was dragged from his saddle before he could bring the maddened animal under control. By that time Rogers was on foot and lifting the limp form to the ground.

"—— in heaven! It's Mason!" he choked after obtaining his first glimpse of the dead man's face.

"Shot twice through the back! I seen th' last shot fired!" hissed the trapper, remounting. "Stay here with him."

"I hear yellin'!" Rogers cried.

But the trapper was now bending low and racing along the back trail of the dead man's horse.

He cleared the woods and struck into a strip of ledge some two hundred feet wide just as a horseman plunged into view from a clump of timber ahead of him. Their recognition was mutual. The trapper swung off to the ground, threw up his rifle and felt his hat give a convulsive jerk as the other fired without dismounting.

The shot was echoed by the trapper's rifle, and the rider pitched to the ground and rolled over on the rock. Pulling a revolver, Joe ran toward him, his hawk-like eyes guarding against a trick.

"Put up your gun. You done for me," faintly greeted the fallen man.

With a quick movement the trapper stripped off the man's belt of weapons; then bitterly accused—

"So it was ye, Durgin, that done for poor Bandy Benton an' Mason!" And he squatted by the wounded man and eyed him wolfishly.

"Boss ordered it," mumbled Durgin, his gray lips twisting. "—— him and his ambitions! Always give me the rough end of the game. Always named me for the worst jobs."

"An' ye would carry out th' bloody orders of a dead man!" gritted Joe.

Durgin showed his teeth in a triumphant grin and whispered:

"Old Oakes was never anything except what he claimed—a gambler. You was mighty soft to be took in like you was."

"Mebbe I was soft. But I'm bitter hard now," murmured Joe.

Then, shoving the muzzle of his revolver into the gray face, he fiercely demanded, "Where's th' gal?"

"Can't scare me. Done for me already," jeered Durgin.

"Where's th' gal?"

"Find her, you're so smart finding things."

Joe withdrew his gun and stared thoughtfully at the man for a few moments. Once more he caught the sound of voices shouting and took time to classify the noise. His eyes brightened with a new hope. He calmly said:

"Ye've got several hours to live if I take good care of ye. There's Injuns comin.' Ah! Ye can hear 'em, can ye? Good. They're either friends o' mine, who'll do as I say, or else they're Utes, who'll make game o' ye till ye die jest 'cause yer skin is white.

"Tell me where th' gal is, or I'll keep ye alive an' turn ye over to 'em. Now, quick!"

Durgin tried to lift his head and failed; but his ears were now registering the whoops of the approaching red men. A terrible fear convulsed his death-struck face.

"Not that! Don't let 'em at me!" he whispered.

Joe rose and beat his palm against his lips and sounded a peculiar, piercing cry. Then, staring down into the distorted visage of the murderer, he promised:

"They'll be here in two minutes. If they're Utes I'll shoot one or two of 'em an' run. They'll do for ye fine. If ye tell me what I want to know I'll shoot ye before I run.

"If they're 'Rapahoes I'll tell 'em ye stole th' white gal that's got their blood in her veins. Then yer master, th' devil, will l'arn some new lessons in deviltry."

A chorus of yells burst from the woods where Joe had left Rogers and Durgin's second victim. Into the narrow opening came Rogers, riding with every ounce of strength left in his horse, and wildly shouting:

"Mountains filled with Injuns! Here they come!"

"Don't shoot, ye fool!" yelled the trapper. "They're friends!"

For he recognized Left Hand in the lead despite the bandage about his head.

"The girl. Little brush shack. Back of Denham's tent," feebly cried Durgin.

"Who killed Denham?"

"The boss."

"Who robbed Laramie Pete?"

"The boss."

"If Old Oakes wasn't yer boss, who is?"

Durgin stared vacantly at his questioner.

"Yer boss? Quick! I will know! *Ohe-e!* Left Hand! This way!"

Already Left Hand was riding down upon him, his dark visage grim with the rage of the defeated.

Durgin's eyes managed to behold the chief, and he commenced choking. The trapper lowered his head to the fluttering lips and caught the faintly whispered words: "Boss is scared. Going to run. I was to clear out with him. You oughter guessed him."

He managed to gasp the all-important word and died at the end of it. An expression of great incredulity spread over his face, then was replaced by a ferocious anger. Springing to his feet, he seized Left Hand's pony by the bridle and demanded—

"What has happened?"

"The Utes are coming. Our medicine was weak," howled Left Hand, tearing his pony free. "Come, white man."

"Your medicine is weak because you left the white-Arapaho girl unguarded and bad white men stole her!" thundered the trapper. "You must turn back and help me get her."

"We ride home to save our women and children. The Great Spirit of the mountains has frowned on his children."

"You ride with me to whip the Utes and turn them back. They can not fight when they are near the medicine spring. The girl is there near the spring.

"Run away, and your village will be burned and your women taken away. Your warriors will lose their heads. The medicine spring is angry that you did not keep the trader's daughter safe."

"The white man does not know what his tongue says," yelped a warrior who was impatient to continue in flight.

"He knows he and one white man whipped the dogs of Utes in the big cañon. He knows he and this one white man here can whip them again. Ride home if you dare and have your squaws call you women.

"Ho! Where are the scalps you promised your women? They say there was a war-dance before you left your village, and that your women told you to bring them back scalps. They say your chief told his men to remember they were Arapaho warriors; to remember they were of the *Inunaina*. Shall they now say you came crawling home with the Utes at your heels to take your women and children?

"Bah! The spirit of the spring is sick of such men. Old Wankanaga will look down on this day and say—

"'Let them breed no more such men among the Cloud-People.

"The little white girl with her few drops of Arapaho blood is a better Arapaho than men who run when no enemy is in sight."

This passionate harangue lifted Left Hand out of his fright and left him in a rage.

"They have many men. We will turn and fight them when we get beyond these woods."

Running to his horse, California Joe jumped into the saddle, and, waving his hat, challenged: "Who is afraid of the Utes? Let him ride home and hide behind the women until an ax is stuck in his head and his women are taken to the Valley of Salt to live with men. Let him who will sing his war-song and drive the Ute dogs back follow me. Here are two white rifles that will make them run."

Then to the bewildered Rogers:

"I know where the girl is. Follow me. We must get her clear before the Utes come along."

HE STARTED toward the sacred spring, well knowing that his appeal to Left Hand could gain nothing in strength through repetition. Left Hand glared after the white men for two

seconds, then tore the bandage from his head, revealing a ghastly scalp wound, and howled an exhortation to his men.

Before the trapper and Rogers could gain the wood the chief was racing after them with his braves streaming along at his heels. They had taken their turn in pursuing and in running away. Now they were on the offensive again, and with a warrior's heart behind their words chanted lustily of the punishment they would measure out to the Utes.

How greatly fear had inflamed their imagination was shown by the next mile of mad travel, which was covered without a Ute being seen or heard. Not until they were near the cañon wall and about to turn to one side and make for the sacred spring did an enemy appear.

Joe and Rogers raced toward the savage, opening fire at long range. The former sustained his reputation as the best all-around shot of the plains by toppling the warrior from his pony.

The spectacle of the Arapahoes charging like fiends and led by two white men caused the Utes to lose all stomach for battle. Before the two bands could come to close quarters the Utes were in flight, some scrambling down the steep wall to take refuge in the depths of the cañon.

Now the Arapahoes were filled with the lust of slaughter and pressed hard after their hereditary foes, their occasional scalp-yell testifying to the taking of gory trophies.

Once the Utes were definitely committed to flight, and in such a panic as to preclude their resuming the offensive, the trapper withdrew from the fight and signaled for Rogers to follow him. He passed the sacred spring and skirted the growth of evergreens until he came to the hidden glade where stood Lucky Denham's wall-tent.

The beat of the flying hoofs brought a man on all fours from the tent, firing a revolver at the respasser. The trapper shot him down without lessening his pace and rode to the very entrance of the shelter before dismounting.

Blankets kicked to one side showed that the man on the ground was taking his ease when surprized. Turning from the tent, Joe rapidly examined the silent form and recognized the dead man as one of Laramie Pete's deserting teamsters.

Calling on Rogers to leave his horse, Joe cast about behind the tent and quickly located the opening of the path which led to the spring. Ignoring this, he examined the edge of the growth until he came to a faintly defined trail. It swung off at right angles to the path.

The two men followed it for a quarter of a mile before they sighted a rough lean-to built of brush and logs. That the structure had been erected recently was indicated by the green leaves on the boughs forming the sloping roof. Several logs, side by side, stood on end and further reinforced by long timbers braced against them, obviously covered the only entrance to the lean-to.

Without a moment's hesitation Joe started on the run for the shelter. Rogers, more wary, kept back in the rear, his rifle half-raised, his startled gaze searching to discover some trap.

It was fortunate for the trapper that the miner was thus cautious. It was the sound of the miner's rifle that brought Joe's head around with a jerk. Rogers pointed to the left and proudly yelled:

"Plugged him just as he was goin' to drop you. He's on th' ground behind that first tree."

"*Hau!* Good for ye, Rogers. Laramie's bar is free to ye when ye git back to Denver.

"Th' man in th' tent was th' night guard. This feller was takin' th' day trick. Inside th' shack there!"

There was a painful silence of several moments, and then a faint voice answered:

"Mary, help me! Who is it? I am June La Blanche. My father is Pierre La Blanche. We are good people."

Joe ran to the logs set on end, tore away the braces and then scattered the remaining timbers until he could thrust his head inside the opening. In one corner crouched the girl, her dark eyes filled with horror.

"My father is Pierre La Blanche—" she began.

"I know, I know!" cried Joe. "You know me? California Joe, at yer service. Yer old friend. Older friend of yer paw's. Ye know Rogers, behind me here.

"Hi! Come forward, Rogers. It's th' little gal. Ye know Rogers, honest miner. He helped me find ye. Been hurt any?"

She shook her head, muttering:

"Not hurt except my heart has scarcely dared to beat. The two men took turns guarding this place. They scared me heart-sick with threats. They did not come near here except to leave food and water.

"The man who gives them orders told them he would kill them if they did— But there were times—at night——"

"Forgit all 'bout it. It's all over. Them two fellers are takin' a mighty long trip. I've come to fetch ye back to yer paw," soothed Joe, who feared for the girl's reason.

With a shriek she ran to him and clung to his arms, incoherent with joy. For a few moments the trapper endeavored in vain to calm her hysteria, then found she was a dead weight in his arms. Privation, or the accumulated results of her terror, had caused her to swoon.

The trapper surveyed the small, pale face in perplexity; then exclaimed:

"Dawg-gone! Here, Rogers! Take her in front of ye an' ride back to th' spring. Left Hand an' his men will pick ye up there an' take ye home. They seem to have quit their squallin', an' I reckon th' fightin's 'bout over."

"But you?" cried Rogers, supporting the girl to his horse, then mounting and receiving her awkwardly in his arms.

"No time to talk! Murder's bein' done up Clear Crick Cañon way. I've got Laramie Pete's gal back for him, but in doin' it I may have lost th' best friend I ever had. Tommy Reason may be wiped out by this time.

"Git th' gal home soon's ye can. Pick up Benton's nag an' when she comes to her senses let her ride him. I'm takin' a little war-path all my own."

With this enigmatic explanation he mounted his horse and raced away.

THE Thunder Birds were lighting on the mountain-tops, and each flap of their immeasurable wings sent ominous rumblings through gorge and cañon. When they opened and closed their eyes sheets of fire zigzagged across the heavens. Straight toward the heart of the storm rode California Joe, the rain blurring his vision and washing out any signs of the Clear Creek posse's trail.

Now the lightning ceased. The gray curtain reaching nearly to the zenith warned him of a cloud-burst, and he hoped that none of his friends were trapped in Clear Creek Cañon.

But it was Tom Reason who filled his mind as he raced into the storm and shaded his eyes from the downpour in hope of sighting the posse. He feared that Reason was foully murdered, and this dread had been his spur ever since leaving Rogers to take the girl home.

"If anything happens to Tommy I'll skin him alive," he fiercely mumbled in his rain-soaked beard. "Old Oakes, nothin' but a gambler. Yas, I reckon I was soft in th' head, jest as that Durgin said.

"An' to think o' th' cold-bloodedness o' that hellion! Plannin' to wipe us out one by one! An' him with his quiet New England talk 'bout town-meetin's! When a New Englander does go wrong I reckon he goes th' limit."

The gray veil made by the descending torrents of water began withdrawing from the mountain-tops, and the sun promptly resumed its work of gilding dripping ledge and cliff. Every rivulet was now an audacious stream, running bank full, and the trapper knew that the crest of the flood had not as yet reached the slope he was crossing.

As the rain ceased he divided his attention between watching for the posse and keeping tabs on the deportment of what a few hours before had been dried beds of waterways. So long as he was on the broad slope where the waters could spread he feared the effects of the cloud-burst not at all, but once he entered the gorge ahead he knew he would be riding with Death.

Just as he was beginning to believe that he must go the whole distance and risk the danger of the gorge he discovered a band of horsemen riding slowly toward him. His first act was to remove the piece of oiled deerskin from the stock of his rifle.

As he increased his pace he began to pick them out as individuals. Then one of the figures recognized him and waved a hand.

"Ol' Tom hisself!" he thankfully exclaimed; and he raised his voice in the war-cry of the Arapahoes.

But Reason rode sedately and did not ride ahead to meet his friend. Joe whispered: "He's been hurt. I'm comin' too late. Th' little cuss has to hold on to his saddle. Man on each side tryin' to steady him, an' he makes 'em keep their distance, th' game little fool! Wal, somebody'll pay a derned high price."

If Reason was hurt he managed a smile, however, as Joe galloped up to him. As he extended his hand Joe saw the hole through the front of the hunting-shirt and noticed the dark stains surrounding.

"Outlaws laid for him! Come near killin'

him!" excitedly babbled one of the men.

"Snake medicine saved me, Joe," proudly announced Reason. "Never go to say anythin' ag'in' that medicine ag'in. Ain't it derned lucky th' squaw wouldn't let me leave it at th' wagons?"

"How bad be ye shot?" curtly demanded Joe, anxious to eliminate any suggestion of sympathy from his voice.

"Jest tickled over th' ribs. It would 'a' gone clear through me, but I had that skin folded up in a wad, an' th' lead hit that, got tired an' jest give my ribs a tunk. An' here I be as good as ever. Why, th' skunk was hidin' ahead of us when we was breakin' camp, an' we never see hair nor hide of him——"

"I know jest how it happened, Tommy. They play it th' same style down Platte Cañon way. Where's Kitts? I got a most important word for him."

Joe would have pushed by them and taken their back track had not Reason informed him:

"Kitts went on ahead to Denver. Goin' to git a lot o' men an' come back an' run them fellers down an' clean 'em up. He can't be very far ahead——"

"Good-by till I see ye ag'in, ye weak-minded little runt. Take yer time gittin' him in, men," broke in Joe; and, swinging his horse about, he scampered down the slope.

INTO Denver rode Parson Kitts on a jaded horse and passed the loungers before the Taos dealer's shack without turning his head, although they clamorously informed him that the bed of Cherry Creek was dry no longer. As he was passing the group and making for the creek California Joe raced into view, his mount in but little better condition than that of Kitts.

To the amazement of the miners Kitts turned in his saddle and without perceptibly diminishing his speed fired at the trapper, with the latter promptly returning the shot. With both men riding at a gallop their lead went wild. California Joe passed the shack with his revolver ready to be thrown down on the bobbing target.

With yells of anger Kitts' friends drew their weapons to take part in the astonishing affair, but there was something so grim and inexorable in the trapper's dark visage that they hesitated. The two men rushed on, and the spectators were dissuaded from venturing nearer the creek as the roaring and groaning up-stream warned them that the watercourse was becoming a death-trap.

Kitts had no thought of holding back because of the oncoming flood. When he struck the creek it was a foot deep with muddy water. The clamor of the flood drowned the sounds of his and the trapper's gun-fire.

Without any hesitation Kitts forced his horse through the current and gained his shack in the middle of the creek's bed. He dismounted, and, holding to the reins, stepped inside the door. Almost instantly he was out again. He carried a bag heavy with gold coins.

As he fought his horse to a moment of acquiescence and climbed into the saddle something slipped from his coat and danced away on the boiling waters—a wig of white hair.

California Joe, now arrived at the bank, saw the wig even before Kitts missed it. He saw the bag and knew that it must contain the gold stolen from Laramie Pete.

The water was now a foot and a half deep. The trapper endeavored to force his horse forward, but the intelligent animal displayed great terror, reared on his hind feet and swung about with his head toward the slope and the spectators timidly venturing there.

Kitts opened his mouth in a laugh of derision and began shooting. No sound of his laugh nor of the shots reached the shore, for the voice of the flood was overwhelming.

Two men rode up and bawled a demand for the trapper to explain his attack on their friend, but as Kitts' lead whistled unpleasantly close they ducked low and rode back. The trapper's horse was now leaping wildly about in evading the water. Kitts emptied one revolver and pulled another.

A third miner dared the shower of lead, and to him Joe took time to yell:

"He's Half-Mask! Durgin's dead. Told everything afore he died."

The man wheeled and scampered up the slope. Joe kicked his horse. The animal stood upright and then crashed to the ground with a bullet through the head. Joe barely escaped being pinned under his mount.

Standing to one side as if scorning to take shelter behind the dead animal, he fired at Kitts just as the latter started toward him.

With a farewell shot Kitts yanked his terrified horse about and splashed toward the opposite shore.

The trapper brought down his gun for a dead-center shot when the appearance of the flood crest caused him to hold his fire. The vengeance of Nature would be infinitely more terrible than a bullet. With one last glance at the oncoming wall of water he turned and ran up the slope.

It was a wall of water and yet it was a wheel of water, rolling over and over and bristling with the trunks of trees it had torn from the banks up the creek. When Kitts saw it and realized that he had delayed a few minutes too long he screamed with terror and senselessly struck the horse upon the head with the barrel of his revolver. The poor brute lost his footing and went down, throwing Kitts under him.

Then the revolving mass of flood débris reached animal and man and gathered them up as a portion of its sum total.

LARAMIE PETE begged his two friends to remain and take an interest in his trading-venture; Natchez implored them to wait until after his wedding and then go prospecting with him in the hills. The girl hung her head and eyed them shyly.

California Joe spoke for himself and his friend when he told them:

"I've seen 'nough o' trade to last me four lifetimes. An' trade is all right an' has to be.

"As to gold-huntin', young man, take th' smallest o' two dern poor ways of earnin' a livin' an' stick to trade. If ye go after gold an' work an' strave an' sweat hard 'nough to find it, it'll probably turn out ye found it for some fellers that never belted a pick into rotten rock.

"Best mine ye ever struck is this little gal. Make sure yer claim to her is all right, then stick close by her. There allers have been gold-mines an' allers will be.

"We won't go into trade an' we won't go out to find gold. I could 'a' had first crack at what these fellers round Denver found—an' one or two rich ones that nobody ain't found yet. But as I've said afore what's th' use? Tom 'n' me would have to go East to spend it. We don't hanker for that country. Lots o' new places out here we ain't looked into yet.

"Tom, how much time d'ye 'low we can lose waitin' for this weddin' to happen?"

Reason held up one finger, caught the girl's pleading look and held up two more. Joe nodded, and said:

"All right. Make it in three sleeps an' we'll be here to wish ye luck. Ye can git jest as fair an' square hitched in three sleeps as ye can in a moon of 'em.

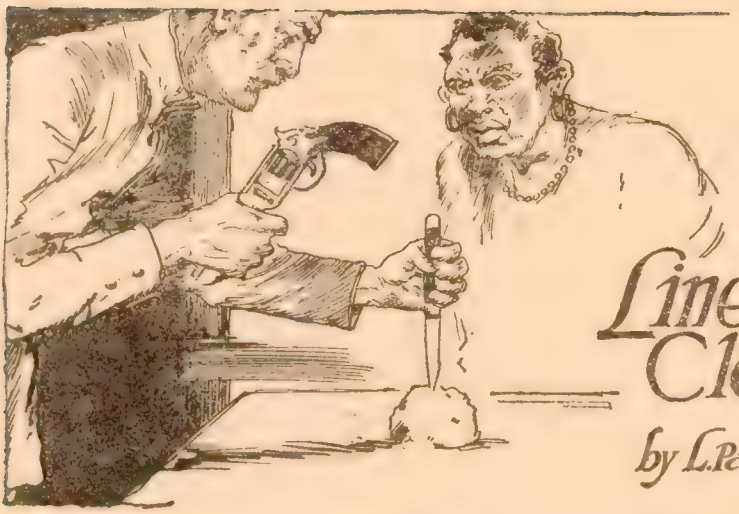
"There's a preachin' feller jest come in from Kansas. He looks spry 'nough to do th' trick.

"Laramie, th' gold dust I slung into yer wagon goes to th' gal. An' he was 'lowin' to give her th' five thousand that was stole from ye twice an' that ye got back from th' crick by jest pure luck."

Laramie Pete suppressed a sigh and agreed that the gold should go to his daughter. California Joe winked slyly at Reason and said:

"Four sleeps from now, then, Tom 'n' me will be makin' for Bridger's Pass. Then for a little visit to th' Mormons, then for th' Oregon, which is a man's size of a country. An' th' time will come when even Oregon will be filled up with Easterners so thick that folks will build fences round their property."

His friends, including even the sober Reason, smiled quietly at such lively imagining.



Lines of Cleavage

by L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Two of a Kind," "Thicker than Water," etc.

THE Major let the magazine—it was an English weekly and open at the Society Notes—fall from his hand and heaved a deep sigh.

Jim, the Hottentot, looked up quickly from his task of putting a final polish on the Major's riding-boots.

"The baas is sick?"

The Major nodded his head wearily.

"Aye, Jim. Sick of all this."

With a wave of his hand he indicated the sun-scorched veld.

"I'll mix the baas some mouti—whisky and quinin." How Jim did stumble over that word. "It will make the baas feel like a new man."

"It's not a body sickness but a soul sickness that troubles me, Jim."

Jim was puzzled. Never before had his beloved baas talked so strangely.

"A sickness of the soul, baas?" he said wonderingly, and picked up the paper which the Major had dropped. "This then must be evil medicine. I will cast it on the fire and thus shall the evil spirits be driven from thee."

The Major made no effort to prevent Jim from burning the paper though he had read but half of it and English papers were as manna in the wilderness in those days of infrequent mails.

He smiled grimly as a passing breeze spread the ashes of the paper thither and yon about the veld.

"It is not thus, Jim," he said, "that the evil spirit is destroyed. Hast ever dreamed?"

—"Many times, baas," Jim answered promptly. "But last night I dreamed I was a powerful chief. Cattle I had; more numerous than the sand of the river-bed; three-score wives dwelt in the shadow of my hut and called me lord. Aye, three-score wives brewed beer for me to drink. I was thirsty and I beat upon the drum that beer might be brought me. Then I awoke. The beating of the drum was, in very truth, a peal of thunder, and barely time had I to get within the shelter of the tent ere came the rain. I was thirsty no longer!"

The Major laughed.

"But the dream is still with thee?"

"Aye," assented Jim sorrowfully. "The dream is still with me; the beer is not."

"And so it is with me. The paper which thou hast destroyed brought me dreams; the dreams are still there."

"Is there aught the baas desires, that the baas has not?" Jim asked incredulously. "Thou hast food enough and drink; all the veld is open to thee and none shall say to thee 'stay,' when thou desirest to go; and none say 'go' when it is thy will to stay. Can there be anything lacking?"

"There is one thing lacking. What do men call me?"

"White men call thee, 'the Major,' and we black ones, 'the Just One,' 'the Wise One,' or yet again, 'the Man of Single Heart,' and—thou art my baas."

"I have yet another name. That ye do not know and shall not know, lest ye

remember it at a time it should be forgotten. The name of my father and my father's father I have not heard these many years. There is a desire within me, new-born, to be called by that name. To that end I am going away from this place—back to my own people."

"It is the coming of the season of rain that makes the baas talk thus. Other white men have I heard talk that way; other men have left this country, cursing it from the depths of their heart. But with the end of the rains they returned, loving that for which they professed hatred."

"Nay, but this is different."

The Major lapsed into English and the drawl, absent from his speech when talking the native language, now became strongly evident.

"I'm going back to the Old Country where a chap can meet decent people; can do decent things in a decent way. I've always been honest with myself but from now on I'm going to play square with the bally laws; 'Render unto Cæsar,' and all that."

Jim, understanding but little, replied as in duty bound—

"Yah, baas!"

"Yes, Jim," continued the Major. "I'm going to render the Government its pound of flesh—three-fifths the value of all the diamonds I find. This other game—there's nothing in it. I've made money, lots of it, and lost it all. Yes, Jim, we're going to be honest and we're going home."

"Yah, baas." agreed Jim.

AT THAT moment an aged negro came into sight. He was beating his way through the thick undergrowth of the bush veld and heading directly toward the tent.

Jim, on sighting the newcomer, rose quickly to his feet and ran to meet him.

The Major adjusted his monocle and stared in amazement.

"Wonder who the old codger is," he muttered. "Never seen him before to my knowledge, and I've never seen Jim so deucedly polite. Bah Jove! He's kotowing to the old chappie as if he were the Lord High Executioner."

Jim and the newcomer were by this time at the green wood fire—so built that the smoke from it kept the flies away from the horses which were tethered near by—and Jim, first seeing that his companion was comfortably seated and plentifully supplied with tobacco, came forward alone.

"It's Mangwato, baas. Chief Mangwato," he said excitedly.

The Major was instantly on the alert. Fabulous tales are told of the wealth of Mangwato and of his hatred and distrust of the white men. Few white men had attempted to enter Mangwato's land. The Major was one of the few; the adventures that befell him have been chronicled elsewhere.

"And what desires Mangwato?"

"A word with thee, baas."

"My ears are open. Tell him to come hither. Nay. Say I will come to him, for he is old, in a little while."

Jim carried the news to the aged chief, who grunted approval and bade Jim sit beside him.

The Major turned his back on the two and, lighting a cigaret, smoked it slowly to the end. Then, and not till then, he walked over to where Mangwato and Jim sat and squatted on his haunches opposite them.

"*Sauka bona*—Greetings to thee, O Mangwato."

Mangwato did not look up and spat into the fire before answering.

"Aye. Greeting to thee, also, white man."

The Major let the monocle fall from his eye. He was too wise in the ways of natives to attempt a conversation while wearing an eye-glass.

"Distrust a man," runs the proverb, "who can not look thee squarely in the eye, and a woman who can."

The eye speaks all languages under the sun, and if the eye says one thing and the tongue another, it is the words of the eye that the native will believe. But how shall the eye speak if it looks through a piece of glass?

In response to a look from his baas Jim rose to his feet, explaining that he must cut fodder for the horses.

"Mangwato, the chief, is far from his kraal," said the Major softly when Jim had departed.

"Two weeks have passed since I left my place," the other replied briefly, "and I have not tarried on the way."

"And the chief is old. Surely the urge must be great."

Now for the first time Mangwato looked up from the ground and, gazing unblinkingly at the white man, was well satisfied with what he saw.

"Thou hast not seen me before, white man?"

"Nay. Yet once I desired to call upon thee. The gun of many voices I brought with me, intending to give it thee for a present. But thy watch-dogs would have none of me."

A grim smile crossed Mangwato's face.

"Word was brought to me of that. Of a truth thou didst deal hardly with my people that day, but not more hardly than I dealt with them when the news was brought me."

"Was it of that thou wished to talk?"

Once again Mangwato closely scrutinized the white man, then speaking slowly, he said—

"It would ill become such men as we, white man, to bandy words as if we were foolish maidens.

"Thou knowest that it is not my custom to hold any dealings with white men. My country is barred to them and none may take up their residence therein, for I have observed that where enters the white men there also enters evil."

"Yet thou hast come to me."

"Aye, for look you, not all the cattle in the herd are black; not all the white men are evil. Much talk have I heard of thee and am well convinced that thou walkest in a straight path."

"White men hold yet another opinion, chief."

The old man made a gesture of impatience.

"Aye. I have also heard of that, but thy heart is clean. Now heed well what I have to say. It hath been at all times my order that no man from my country should go to labor in the mines of the white men. But, alas, there is little respect for wise counsel in the minds of the young men, and many of them, won by the false promises of the agents of the white men who came seeking to recruit them, have disobeyed my commands. Thou knowest how the white men's gold hath power to lure my people from their traditions?"

"That I well know, chief."

"Also thou knowest how they return to live once again among us, wearing strange clothes and swearing by strange gods—ever breeding discontent. But this alone would be as nothing. This I can forgive for in time the disobedient ones return to the customs of their fathers.

"Of late my young men who have worked in the mines return to us broken in spirit and in body. Some—ah me—return not at all, for, as they journey to my country after serving the allotted time at the mines, evil men—white men look ye—have set upon them, beating them sorely and taking from them all that they had earned during those months of labor."

The Major was silent. He knew only too well to what the chief alluded. Certain low, degenerate white men looked upon the native laborers returning to their kraals after a year's service at the mines as their legitimate prey. Nor were they content in simply robbing the natives of their hard-earned gold but savagely attacked and mutilated—in some cases, killed—such natives who dared to make a stand to protect their property.

"It is a thing of shame, O Mangwato. With such white men I claim no kin. Yet hath not this very evil much in it to commend itself to thee? Will not the tales of the young men thus abused prevent others from seeking work at the mines?"

"The buck is killed at the water-hole, white man, but others still go there to drink. Further, the time draws nigh when certain of my young men will be released from the mines to return to their kraals."

"And is it to greet them that chief Mangwato hath trekked thus far from his own place?" The Major's tone was mildly sarcastic.

"For them I have no care, white man. Yet one among them is my son and for him I fear. What though I declared before the people that I would put him from me dared he to seek service with the white men! What though I ordered that none should speak his name, no, not even in the darkness of the huts! He is my son and I—I am less than the spirits. He is the last of my name. Should he die or come to severe hurt at the hands of these jackals who prey at night, then my name will be forgotten, for there is no other to take my place."

Mangwato's voice broke.

"Why dost thou come to me? Can not the police aid thee?"

"I trust them not. It is whispered that

they know of the evil but, shutting their eyes, declare that they see it not."

"Then go to thy son, warning him of the perils which beset his path."

"I would not have my son—my disobedient son—know that I am concerned for his welfare. Neither would he relish being treated as a maiden. He is a man; he would go his own way, brooking no interference."

"Then?"

"It is to you I appeal, white man. Save my son from the evil ones. Let him return, unharmed, to the place of his fathers."

"What is thy son's name?"

"Simba is his name, white man. Simba, the lion."

The Major rose to his feet signifying that the interview was at an end.

"What I can do, I will do, O Mangwato. Wilt thou wait here to greet thy son?"

"Nay. He must find me at my own place; my hand must not appear in this."

"It is well. *Hamba gaghle*—May thy path be smooth."

"Good rest be thine," intoned the chief.

"JIM," said the Major, when the Hottentot rejoined him after having escorted Mangwato to the trail which ran through the bush veld some distance beyond the tent, "said Mangwato anything to you of his errand?"

"Aye. But what can the baas do? These evil white men who rob the returning laborers have no fear of the law; they kill in the dark and there is none to bear witness against them."

"Yet I have given my word. Here is money, Jim. Go down to the compounds and keep thy ears open for talk of Simba and of the way in which these white men do their evil work. Without doubt they have spies in the compound who take word to them of the time certain laborers will be released from their mines, the amount of their wealth and the trail they intend to take."

"And what if none speak of these things?"

"Thou hast money. Money will purchase beer, and beer unloosens the tongues of men."

"That is true, baas. I go now. But what of thee?"

"I will go to the place of Kafir Smith. Mayhap I will learn of something there."

IN THE dark alleyway forming one of the many entrances to Kafir Smith's saloon the Major bumped into a thick-set, flashily dressed man who was conversing with a heavily veiled woman.

"—— you! Look where you're going," blustered the man.

"I beg your pardon, really. It's so dark here, you know, coming out of the blaze of Old Sol. What?"

"A bloomin' dude, eh?" sneered the other. "Well get to —— out of here before I kick you out. I'm having a business interview with this lady."

The Major doffed his helmet.

"'Pon my soul!" he ejaculated, "I didn't see the lady." Seeing that the man was holding the woman firmly by the wrists he went on—

"You will forgive me, madam, I'm sure, if I suggest that this is hardly the place for a charming lady like yourself to hold, er—a business interview with this—er—gentleman."

"Why, you—toad!"

The man released his hold on the girl's wrists and turned threateningly on the Major who, smiling happily, awaited the expected onslaught.

"Please don't." The girl's voice had a sweet note of entreaty.

The Major dropped his hands and bowed.

"Dreadfully boorish of us, I'll admit, and of course, dear old walrus—" the man had a heavy, black mustache— "we can't fight when a lady says 'No.' The Major has never been deaf to the appeals of the well-known weaker sex."

He looked at the girl meaningly as he concluded, hoping that she would understand his offer of help.

She lifted her veil a moment and the Major read her thanks in her clear, gray eyes. She let the veil fall and crouched back against the wall, making room for him to pass by and on into the saloon.

"Mornin', Major," Aggie called gaily as he entered. "What've you done with Porky and Jong? Nobody has seen 'em since they went on that business-trip with you."

"Give you my word, dear old thing," he drawled. "I can't imagine where they've gone."

He looked around the deserted barroom.

"All alone, eh? No one in there?"

He nodded toward the door leading to an inner room.

"No. I'm all alone. The police are getting nosey and asking too many questions. Seems they've got a new chief who means business, so the boys are keeping away."

The Major nodded and turned to leave. No need for him to waste time here. Perhaps, if the police were playing a straight game, it would be better to put the matter of protecting Mangwato's son in their hands. Yet——

He stopped at Aggie's voice.

"Stay a little while, can't yer, Major? If you only knew how sick I am of this place. Not a thing to do except serve drink to drunken beasts who've forgotten they were ever born of woman."

The Major, surprized at such an outburst from one whom he had considered vapid and empty-headed, walked over to her.

"So you're sick of it too?"

She laughed harshly.

"I wish to —— that I'd never come to the place. I had a good situation in London"—she sighed reminiscently—"a mahogany counter with solid-silver taps. Only real gents came there. Gents like you. They used to call me 'Miss Harris.' Here it's 'Aggie this,' and 'Aggie that,' till I fair forgets that I've got any other name."

"It's like that with me, too," murmured the Major. "Why did you leave London?"

"It was the money. I thought I'd be able to save up enough in a year or two to buy a pub of my own somewhere in the country, back home. But what's the use of money when every decent woman turns up her nose at the sight of me?"

She buried her face in her hands and sprawled across the bar, heedless of the suds of beer, the dregs of many glasses, which soiled her much belaced blouse.

"Cheer up, Miss Harris, old thing."

The Major placed a kindly hand on her shoulder.

She suddenly sat erect and passed a heavily scented handkerchief across her eyes.

"I'm a fair cut-up, ain't I?" she sighed. "I had you going for fair. *Whoop la!*"

But underneath the gaiety was the suggestion of utter despair.

"Why don't you go back home? There's nothing to stop you."

"A fat lot you know about that. How can I go home without money?"

"But—er—I thought you made a lot?"

"So I have, but Kafir Smith, my boss, has been keeping it for me. He said it would be dangerous for a woman to have a lot of money about her in this country. And now he won't give it to me."

"Have you any receipt?"

"No. I never thought he would play me such a dirty trick. I thought he was a gentleman."

"What's Kafir Smith look like? I've never met him."

"There's his picture." Aggie pointed to a large portrait in colored chalks which adorned one side of the barroom.

Examining it, the Major recognized it as the picture of the man he had met in the alleyway. Also there was something hauntingly familiar about the man. The Major felt that he had met him before in some other place; at some other time.

"Is he married?"

"No." The girl's tone was bitter. "He made up to me until I gave him my money for safe-keeping. Kafir Smith ain't got no interest in women save for the money he can get out of them. They say he's got a hold on most of the women in this dorp."

"A blackmailer, eh?" And the Major's thoughts reverted to the girl he had seen with Smith in the alley.

Aggie nodded.

"Yep. Something like that."

"How does he get his hold over them?"

"He runs a gambling-outfit and a lot of women owe him money. Then some of them were barmaids before they married and turned respectable. They don't want their old profession thrown in their faces."

"I see. How much money has Kafir Smith belonging to you?"

"Five thousand pounds."

The Major whistled.

Aggie flared up angrily.

"It's all honestly earned, too. I may be a barmaid but I've always run straight." Aggie was unconsciously quoting from her favorite author.

The Major was all apologies.

"I never doubted that for a moment, Miss Harris, old top. But if you had the money, would you go home?"

"You've said it," Aggie replied with fervor. "But what's the use of whining? I've made my bed and I must lie in it and I'm so —— tired I can sleep most anywhere."

THE Major found Jim awaiting him when he returned to his tent which was pitched on the edge of the township. The Major preferred sleeping in his tent on the open veld to the filthy accommodations provided by the town's one hotel—Kafir Smith's saloon.

"I've talked with Simba, baas, and also with the native police at the compound; they, as ye supposed, are in league with the white men."

"What said Simba?"

"Ten men of his kraal return to their own place, leaving the compound before the setting of today's sun."

"So soon? Then Mangwato came just in time."

"Perhaps, though it may well be that Simba will never live to pay homage to his father."

"How then?"

"He hath made much money, won at games of chance. This the white men are determined to get, and they have planned well.

"Simba they have prevailed upon to wait for the rising of the moon, before setting on his journey homeward. He hath a greed for the liquor of the white men and much of this they have promised to give him. One hath already arranged with him the place of meeting.

"After they have taken his money they intend to kill him—they fear the wrath of the white police should he live to bear witness against them—making it appear as if he were killed in a drunken fight with his own people. Aye, the plan is a cunning one and likely to succeed for I could not shake Simba from his purpose of keeping his tryst with the white man."

"And the other men of Mangwato's kraal they will not touch?"

"Nay, baas, for they are penniless."

"Thou knowest the meeting-place?"

"Aye. It is not far from this place. One white man will meet Simba and take him to where the others are hidden, fully an hour's trek away, for they dare not do the deed near to the trail for fear of being seen. It is whispered that the eyes of the white police have of late been opened."

SO IT happened that the lewd song which Hawkins, a rat-faced little cockney, was singing to keep up his courage while awaiting the coming of Simba was rudely interrupted.

Without a chance for outcry, failing to catch a glimpse of his captors, he was bound hand and foot, securely gagged and rolled into a thick clump of bushes near by.

A few minutes later Simba, a finely developed native, came to the place.

"Art thou there, white man?" he called softly.

"Aye."

A tall figure stepped forward out of the shadows.

"Then let us hasten to the place ye spoke of, for I have far to go ere I catch up with my brothers."

"I can not take thee." There was fear in the white man's voice. "The white police have taken my friends; they have taken also the beer. Further, word has come to my ears that they are even now seeking thee."

"To what end?"

"Thou hast played the game of chance, winning much money from the men at the compounds. Knowest not that it is against the white man's law thus to gamble?"

"Then I will get from this place ere day comes and finds me."

"How canst escape them? They are mounted. Canst outrun the horse?"

"Nay." Simba's tone was one of despair. "What will they do to me, white man?"

"Send ye back to labor in the mines. But see, I am sorry for thee. I will be thy friend. Hast twenty pounds?"

"That and more would I give rather than return to labor in the mines."

"Give me twenty; it will serve. In return take thou this horse and ride fast. Should any white man call to thee answer not, but ride on."

A moment later the rapid drumming of horse's hoofs told that Simba had followed the counsel of his benefactor.

A second figure came out of the shadows and joined the first.

"That was well done, baas. Mangwato will be well pleased."

"Aye. Also I received a good price for the horse. He was getting old and of no further use to me. Take thou the money, Jim. It is thine."

"Thanks, baas. What shall I do with the jackal back yonder?"

"Untie his hands, Jim. The rest he can see to himself. At any rate he can take the gag from his mouth and cry for aid. Before that comes we shall be safely in the

camp, knowing nothing of the happenings of this night."

When they had reached the tent Jim, contrary to his custom, did not go straightway to his blankets by the camp-fire, but followed his baas into the tent.

"What is it, Jim?" the Major asked sharply. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts; to plan the campaign that would reinstate him in the eyes of the law.

Jim fumbled in the cavernous depths of the pocket of one of the Major's discarded great coats which he wore. From it he produced what appeared to be a bundle of filthy rags and held it out toward the Major.

"Mangwato bade me give thee this if thou succeeded in saving his son from the evil ones."

The Major looked at the bundle with mock horror.

"Does the chief wish me to become a thing unclean, that he sends me such a present?"

"When one is thirsty it is not well to consider the outside of the pot, baas."

"Then break the pot, Jim, and let us see its contents."

Jim slowly unwound the greasy rags, disclosing what at first appeared to be a solid piece of glass, shaped roughly like a paperweight. The Major took it amusedly in his hands and was surprized at the weight of it.

"Nearly three pounds, if I'm any judge. I wonder——"

He held it up to the light of the oil lamp and examined it closely, turning it over and over.

"I must be dreaming," he muttered. Then he almost dropped the stone in his excitement. "But it is; it is! There's no doubt about it! And there's nothing like it under the sun. Jim, old top, there's the price of a kingdom right here in my hand, and it's mine, honestly mine. All the stories told about Mangwato's bushel of diamonds are true; this is one of them. Tomorrow I'll make an application for a diamond-mining permit and when that's granted I'll register the discovery of the biggest diamond the world has ever known. Don't you see what this means?"

"I see nothing but a dirty piece of glass, baas," Jim replied stolidly.

The Major laughed, a happy, care-free laugh. In his excitement he was a boy once more.

"Hush, baas!" Jim warned. "Some one is coming here, on horseback."

The Major sobered instantly and they both listened.

"The horse is lame, Jim," the Major commented.

"May I come in?"

The Major started at the sound of the voice, recognizing it as belonging to the girl he had seen with Kafir Smith earlier in the day.

He went to the flap of the tent and held it open so that she could enter.

She looked about her, half-blinded by the glare of the lamp, then sitting down in the camp-chair which the Major pushed toward her, buried her face in her hands and began to cry softly.

The Major looked on helplessly.

"Do you think you are wise coming here at this time of night? I have a bad reputation, you know."

She looked up quickly.

"I know you must think dreadful things, but I had to take a desperate chance that you could help me. There's no one else I can appeal to, and you did offer your help this morning, didn't you? Besides, I am armed."

She held a toy revolver in her hand.

"And I'm not."

The Major unbuckled his revolver and pushed it toward her.

"Yes, I will help you if I can," he continued gravely. "But don't you think you'd better allow me to escort you home?"

"No. You must listen to me first. I often go for moonlight rides, and tonight my horse went lame. That will be an explanation for my late return."

The Major nodded.

"Suppose you begin at the beginning. It's about Kafir Smith, I suppose."

"Yes. I first met Kafir Smith when I was a barmaid in Johannesburg. Yes," she said vehemently in answer to the Major's look of incredulity, "I was that. When my father died, leaving me penniless, there seemed nothing else I could do. Father had, at one time, owned a large saloon, and——"

"I see," commented the Major.

"Three years ago I met and married Roger Griffin while I was on a holiday at Durban and never told him I'd served behind a bar."

"That was a mistake."

"Yes, I know that now. But Roger's

proud and comes of an old family. To have told him would have meant losing him. Well, shortly after we were married Roger was smitten with the diamond fever and came up here. Smith recognized me at once and I wrote to him, begging him to keep my secret. He did not answer and later he accosted Roger when I was with him and told him that he had known me in Johannesburg. That night I wrote another letter to Smith, couching it in even more urgent terms than the first. Ever since then he has kept those letters, threatening to show them to Roger if I refused to do as he ordered."

"But what harm if he did?"

"Can't you see? I didn't say in the letters what my secret was and you can imagine the vile interpretation Smith would make of it. First of all he demanded money as the price of his silence. Then he made me persuade Roger to invest all his capital in some worthless mining property. Roger's trying to sell it now, so that we can raise sufficient money to pay our passage home.

"This morning Smith said that I must go to him tomorrow night. If I don't he says he'll give Roger the letters, and besides he says he's got evidence that Roger has been buying diamonds from the natives. I know that's a lie, for Roger has always scorned the I. D. B's. He says they are robbing the Government of a legitimate revenue and so set back the development of the colony."

The Major winced.

"So you think that—er—Roger is not guilty of I. D. B.?"

"I know he's not. But that won't prevent Smith from framing a case against him. Smith's got a lot of influence."

She rose wearily to her feet.

"There, now I have told my story. I don't know why, or why I came here. There's nothing that you can do. Tomorrow I'll go to Smith, but I'll go armed."

Then, before the Major could answer her, she ran from the hut, mounted her horse and rode swiftly toward the town, urging her lamed mount to his best speed.

"JIM."

The Hottentot, who had left the tent at the first appearance of the girl, came running to the call.

"Yah, baas?"

"What make you of the white woman?"

"In the light of day it is hard to read a woman's face, baas. At night! Ow! It is a task for the spirits."

"She sounded true to me," the Major mused. "Poor little woman! What have ye heard of the white man, Griffin, Jim?"

The Major knew that the natives at the compounds always talked of their bosses, comparing their merits and their failings, and that if you would know a man's true character go to the natives who work for him.

"The blacks at compound say Baas Griffin good man. Treat his men —— well. But he's a fool. He know nothing about mines. He look for diamonds in vain. He has no money and has not paid his boys for long time."

"Yet they still work for him?"

"Aye. They say if their baas thinks there's diamonds in mine they'll keep on working so long as they have food. That will not be long."

The Major paced up and down the tent for a few minutes. At each turn, as he passed the big diamond which lay on the table, he paused and looked at it.

"It is too big," he said at length. Picking it up, he discovered a flaw running right through the center of it.

He put the diamond on the camp-table in the tent and opening a large hunting-knife, held the blade firmly along the flaw—the line of cleavage.

The Major then delivered a tremendous blow on the back of the blade with the butt of his revolver and the diamond parted in two almost equal parts.

On each side of one of the pieces he pasted a snapshot of himself and then put it in his pocket. The other he gave to the wondering Jim.

"Thou knowest the mine of the baas Griffin?"

"Aye, baas."

"And it is unguarded?"

"What need to guard? There is naught of value in it."

"Then come with me; we have much work to do ere the rising of the sun."

SO ENGROSSED was Kafir Smith at his task of reckoning up the day's takings that he did not hear the door of his room open and close, but at the click of a key in the lock he turned round with an oath.

A tall, immaculately dressed man, wearing a monocle, came toward him.

"Who the —— are you and what do you want?"

The other laughed.

"Tut tut! That's no way to treat a visitor. I want to have a little chat with you, and this—" he playfully dangled the key of the door between his fingers—"tells me that we are going to have it free from interference. Isn't that rippin'?"

A sudden light dawned on Smith.

"Oh, you're the English dude they call the Major, are you?" he sneered. "Well, this is the way I talk to you!"

He made a lightning grab for the revolver which hung beside his desk.

"No you don't." The voice was curt and crisp. The monocle had dropped from the Major's eye and with it the inane, almost vacant appearance of the Major's face.

Smith's hand dropped to his side. He was too wise to disobey the commands of a man who held a revolver in his hands and was reputed to be a dead shot.

"Well, what is it you want?"

The Major replaced the monocle and sat down in a chair close to Smith, holding the revolver carelessly on his knees.

"That's better," he said. "Now we can have a comfy chat. Nice place you've got here."

He waved one hand airily, indicating the pictures of nude women which covered the walls. "Nice, that is, for a swine like you."

Smith's face turned purple with wrath, but he made no reply.

"You know," said the Major confidentially, "I've got a feeling that I've seen you before somewhere. Now where could it be?"

"How the —— do I know? I don't remember every fool I meet."

"You don't? I do. Now let me see. You're not Spike Dougan by any chance?"

"My name's Smith, you fool."

"Ah, yes. And of course you couldn't be Spike. He died of D. T's years ago. How silly of me. Wait, I have it. Hold up your left hand."

Reluctantly Smith obeyed. Three fingers were missing.

The Major put his head back and roared with laughter, but the muzzle of the revolver which he held on his knee did not waver from its aim at the pit of Smith's stomach.

"Oh, this is too rich," chortled the Major. "Really it'll be the death of me. I came here to rob, but instead I'm going to blackmail you."

Smith flushed and moved uneasily.

"What do you mean?"

"Fancy meeting you here of all places, dear old Three-Fingered Sam, wanted for forgery, bigamy, jail-breaking and the Lord knows what besides."

At the sound of his old-time nickname Smith turned pale under his tan.

"Not so loud," he implored. "Some one may hear you. You said you came here on business—came to steal. Well, what do you want?"

"The letters written to you by Mrs. Griffin."

"So you're after her, are you?"

"Don't make me angry, Sam, because anger contracts the muscles and that would be very unpleasant for you. This revolver has a light touch and the slightest contraction of the finger would—well, I would hate to be hanged for killing a swine like you. Get the letters."

Smith opened a drawer of his desk and took out a bulky package of letters. Selecting two, he handed them to the Major. The others he was about to put back but the Major held out his hand for them, and Smith grudgingly handed them over.

"I'll see that they are returned to their proper owners, Sam. You ought to thank me for saving you so much trouble."

"Is there anything else you'd like?" Smith's tone was almost meek.

"Why yes, now you mention it, there is. Five thousand pounds, please."

"You'll ruin me, Major," Smith whined.

"Oh, I don't think so. I'm letting you off bally easy, really. Just think. I'd only have to go to the police and say that Kafir Smith is another name for Three-Fingered Sam and even your pull wouldn't save you."

"I know, I know. I'll give you the money. Will my check do?"

"Yes. I fancy you won't dare go back on it. Make it out to A. Harris."

"Didn't know that was your name." Smith had forgotten, if he ever knew, that Aggie, his barmaid, was named Harris.

"The trouble with you, Smith, is that you don't remember the name of every —— fool you meet."

The Major carefully folded the check and put it in his pocket.

"I think that'll be all, Sam, except that

young Griffin is a friend of mine. I don't want to hear of his being arrested for I. D. B."

"You won't squeal, will you, Major?"

"No. You're safe as far as I'm concerned. Ta ta!"

Next morning the Major dropped in at Kafir Smith's place before applying for his mining-permit at the registration office. Aggie was talking to some men at the other end of the bar, but when she saw him, she hurried over.

Her face was wreathed in smiles and she hummed a gay little tune.

"You're happy, Miss Harris?"

"I'm going home, Major, I'm going home. Smith sent me a check this morning by the first mail. I've already booked my passage and I'm leaving for Cape Town on the night train."

"Congratulations, I'm sure, and the best of luck."

"Major." Aggie's voice dropped to a whisper. "You've always treated me as if I were a lady, and I'm going to do a thing for you that I've never done before. I'm going to squeal on the boys. Listen; you know Cockney Hawkins?"

The Major nodded.

"Well it seems that he and his bunch have got it in for you. When you were away from your tent last night, they hid some diamonds in your baggage, and one of them followed you and your boy to Griffin's mine, though what you should want there — only knows. Hawkins went up to the police office this morning and said that he had seen you and the black go to the mine and afterward bury some diamonds in your tent. He said that he turned queen's evidence because you hadn't split fair with him on some other deal. They captured your boy down at one of the compounds about an hour ago, and two of the police have taken him to your camp."

This news staggered the Major. He knew that it would be hopeless to try to face the thing out. His reputation would not stand for it. But it was hard that the blow should come just at the time when he had determined to run straight with the Government.

"You'd better run for it, old dear," Aggie whispered softly. "Come back to England with me. I've got enough money to buy that pub I was speaking of the other day, and——"

He took her hand and pressed it.

"You're a brick, old dear, but I can't do it, really. I must look after my man. Have you some paper and string? I want to wrap up a little present. Oh, yes, and some writing-paper too."

Aggie brought him the things he asked for and the Major swiftly wrote a short note. Then taking from his pocket the diamond on which he had pasted his photo, he wrapped it up, enclosing with it the letter he had written. The package he addressed to the chief of the police.

"Mail this for me, old dear, will you? I've no time to spare."

"All right. Good-by, and the best of luck."

THE rest is better told by extracts from *The Diamond*, the weekly newspaper of the township.

The first is headed "A Big Find at the Griffin Mine," and runs, in part:

"Mr. Griffin's eye was caught by the gleam of a brilliant object midway up the bank of one of his excavations. Climbing up to it, he discovered it was a brilliant crystal. Digging it out, his first thought was that some practical joker had planted a large chunk of glass there for him to find, for it was so large he knew it could not be a diamond. Determined to test the stone on the spot, Griffin rubbed the dirt from one of its faces and soon convinced himself that it was not a lump of glass but a diamond crystal of exceptional whiteness and purity.

"Taking it to the office of the registrar, where it was properly cleaned, Mr. Griffin found to his happy astonishment that it weighed all of three thousand carats; more than three times that of any other diamond that has been discovered. The diamond is a fragment, probably less than half, of a distorted octahedral crystal. Who will be the fortunate miner to discover the other portion?

"Mr. Griffin has sold his mine to a syndicate headed by Kafir Smith, and will sail with his beautiful wife for England some time this week."

Another extract is headed:

"The Major Misses a Fortune, but Gets Away."

"Word having been brought to a member of our efficient police force that a certain notorious I. D. B., commonly called the Major, was seen leaving with his native servant the Griffin mine, steps were at

once taken to apprehend him. Added zest was given to the chase when Hawkins, an old confederate of the Major's, turned queen's evidence and stated that he had watched the Major hide some diamonds in his tent.

"Jim, the Major's Hottentot servant, was arrested at one of the compounds and taken by troopers Blake and Sims to the Major's tent, intending to make him show where his baas hid the diamonds.

"Suddenly, while they were cross-examining the native, the tent collapsed on top of them, entangling them in its folds. When they finally extricated themselves it was to find that their prisoner had vanished, their horses galloping back to town; while in the distance, and in the opposite direction, was a cloud of dust which told only too plainly that the Major had escaped the arm of the law once again.

"Colonel Hammond, the chief of police, who is down here on inspection duty, tells us that on the day of the Major's escape he received through the mail a large glass paper-weight, on the top and bottom of which were pasted portraits of the Major. Enclosed with the paper-weight was the following letter, couched in the Major's well-known style:

Dear and honored Chief:

I foresee that I am about to take a long journey. Will you therefore accept the enclosed as a memento of,

I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your Obedient Servant,
THE MAJOR.

P. S. Some day I shall come back for the paper-weight. I hope you will keep it safe for me.

"Colonel Hammond is highly delighted with his present and thinks that for once the Major has overreached himself.

" 'We have always wanted a portrait of the Major,' he said, 'and now I have one that will always be before me when I sit at my desk. You may rest assured that when the Major does call for his paper-weight I will give it to him and,' the colonel added with a sly smile, 'perhaps I'll give him something else—who knows?' "

ZOZOMEE

by Gordon Young

Author of "Wild Blood," "Rich Crooks," etc.

CASPER P. KASE, LOANS, in simple black lettering appeared on the glazed door of the room to the right of the elevator on the second floor of a third-class office-building known as the Dunkart Block.

A maker of artificial limbs, a manufacturing jeweler, an oil company operating largely by mail, a pair of painless dentists, a shyster or two, a trading-stamp agent and such, made up the assortment of frayed, grayed, baffled, bluffing or furtive men that dodged

along a jump or so ahead of creditors and filled the building with their businesses.

The hallways were gloomy and vaguely lighted even in the day. A pokey elevator with a club-footed pilot ran stealthily up and down, with occasional jarring clang and click of doors in the sepulchral halls.

The pilot was smoking a cigaret and reading baseball news at the fifth floor—when he was out of sight people often walked rather than wait—as the buzzer whirred.

He put over the lever and began drifting down to the first floor where he opened the cage to a slender, dark man of a distinctively neat appearance.

Robert Guinnell was deceptively youthful in appearance, unless closely observed. He seemed almost boyish, was always pleasant, his dress was fastidiously conservative, and he had vitality, energy, a quickness of movement, an impulsive graciousness of speech and manner that was likely to please strangers and charm friends. People liked him.

A slight, delicately adjusted mustache gave an interesting shadow to his lip. His skin was dark, quite dark, and the complexion was always noticed by women, who were inclined to wish for intimacy enough to ask what he used. The nose was thin and straight. He was of the type that is called aristocratic. His dark hair had a natural sheen; his feet were narrow; his hands slender, almost fragile.

Manners are contagious. The pilot became polite when Guinnell asked if Mr. Kase was in.

Said the elevator man:

"De ole man got a stranger wit' 'im. A goil. He won't be busy long. She wored a veil. Dat means she's got somepin' ter sell."

Guinnell stepped into the hall and was busy with a little reference-book until the elevator drifted out of sight; then he walked past the CASPER P. KASE, LOANS, turned a corner, and glancing cautiously around, put a key into a solid door with a brass plate marked "Private."

On the other side of the hall the dynamo of the manufacturing jeweler droned like a great tireless fly in a bottle.

GUINNELL came into a small carpetless room.

An unmade iron bed with rumpled red comforters was in one corner, an iron safe, big as half an elephant, in another. Not much space remained. A plain pine table with a dilapidated Morris chair beside it was under the low electric globe that had a piece of newspaper shaped to a cone for a shade.

The room was unclean, dusty and close. A narrow window overlooked the alley. The window was raised for ventilation less than two inches, and the blind was down to the sill.

He looked about uninterested, and stood rather than try to find a place where he cared to sit. With the point of his flexible cane he idly made marks in the dust that was on the black sides of the safe; but he was attracted by the raised voice of a man in the next room and went to the peep-hole in the door beside the safe.

The office of Casper P. Kase was divided by a long counter topped with glazed glass that had two grilled windows through which the money-lender met his public.

Whenever the front door opened a bell rang, and a square-built man with a square-cut gray beard, quite bald, with heavy glasses and a smoking-jacket, would shuffle into view from the private room or from the screen behind the long counter.

Kase was slow of speech and manner, heavy on his feet, and though less than normal height, he had shoulders that filled a doorway.

Kase had brought his customer to the table behind the screen. It was not often he did that. Guinnell could see her plainly.

The veil had been lifted. Guinnell was impressionable but cautious. In his work it was needful to be wary of women.

By chance he had a weakness for red hair—for real shimmering, copperish hair; but that might have attracted only fleeting admiration if it had not been even less arresting than her personality.

Through a peep-hole fifteen feet away even a shrewd observer may not get an accurate impression of a personality, but the impression may be none the less appealing.

Guinnell was fascinated. She was young and lovely; her eyes were dark, the lashes long, shadowy, silken, and though her face was very pretty it looked intelligent, vividly so.

She seemed but little embarrassed, if at all, and even people who knew Kase well were likely to be uneasy when he began to haggle.

He was saying—

"These ain't so fine as what they look."

"It has been in the family for years."

"Yes. I know. I know all about family jewels. They are never what the newspapers say about 'em. I give you——"

He named the price. She shook her head slightly and made no comment. It was hard to bluff with Kase.

"How'd I know you didn't steal this?" he demanded abruptly, accusingly.

To himself Guinnell said—

"He knows that she did."

The girl replied angrily—

"I don't think it would make any difference to you whether I stole it or not."

"What! You accuse me of dealin' with crooks! If I thought you was a thief I'd have the police this minute. This minute. But I tell you what I'll do. I think you are a good, honest girl that needs some helpin'. I'll give you ——."

Kase counted out the money from a thick wallet while she signed in the register.

The girl swept the bills into a hand-bag, stuffing them down; then she dropped her veil and hurried out, eager to be gone.

Guinnell came into the room and close up behind Kase.

"Oh—you," said the old man, surprized. "You don't make so much noise as a shadow, do you?"

"Who is she?" Guinnell asked.

"Ho! You was peepin'. She is a slick one. And pretty. There's her name—" he pushed the book toward Guinnell. "It don't mean nothing—a name in this book. Any old name goes."

Kase chuckled sluggishly as he lifted the necklace to the light.

Guinnell read—

Mrs. Harrison Webster

"The ——," he cried. "This name—She was no more Mrs. Harry than I am!"

"What is it? What is it?" Kase asked heavily as he bent over the book.

"Mrs. Harry—a little brunette—a sleek thin, little brunette——"

Kase's large, short body began to shake like jelly in a nervous hand as he chuckled.

"—— it's the Websters I'm visiting tonight," said Guinnell.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho! It is a joke. This necklace—it *is* Mrs. Webster's!"

"No?" Guinnell was astonished at the girl's impudence.

"Sure. Some Webster jewels was stole three or four years ago. I saw this necklace then. Ever'thing was recovered an' no questions asked. The reward was big. Webster wanted 'em back 'cause his grandmother wore 'em."

"But her cold nerve—to write down Mrs. Webster's name and address! Who is she, Kase?"

"You think I ask my customers a lot of questions that ain't none of my business? I am discreet."

"She's worth knowing, Kase. I would like to meet her. That hair— I wonder who she is."

"You go and get skirts tangled in your feet—*zowie!* Watch your step where there are skirts."

Guinnell laid the necklace across the fingers of his left hand and held it to the light, examining it critically. It was an old-fashioned piece of jewelry made of coral, sapphires, diamonds, ornamental settings and a pendant rose diamond.

"There's been no report of robbery."

"My boy, maybe Mrs. Webster don't know what's happened yet."

"Then," said Guinnell, "she has been clever to get away with this and not make a noise. Mrs. Harry is not a silent loser at whist, jewels or—love. Just now she's playing a desperate game."

Kase eyed him shrewdly, asking—

"She's a brunette?"

"Black as the Queen of Spades—inside and out. The devil's daughter and must play with fire."

"And Webster?" Kase asked.

"Webster? A little stupid but a gentleman."

"Bah," said Kase. "You gentlemen make me tired. You're always doin' what you should be ashamed of but ain't. I don't like gentlemen. I like fellers you can always count on."

They went through the dirty little room by which Guinnell had entered the office, crossed the hall and passed into the manufacturing jeweler's, where Guinnell critically examined many new ornaments.

THE Harrison Websters were giving a lawn-party in the glow of electrically lighted paper lanterns strung by the hundreds about the house and dangling from shrubs.

A reporter spoke of it as "literally a brilliant affair;" and so it was. Very much of

a crush, too. The house and grounds were overrun with people. Harrison Webster was bowing this way and that to persons he had never seen before, whose names he had never heard. In the matter of friends, his wife ran to quantity and liked mobs.

He was a mild, uncomplaining, prematurely middle-aged man, and was very much talked about behind his back. His wife, it was said, could do anything with him.

Before her marriage she had been a semi-impoverished man-hunter. Pretty, sly, bold and desperate, she played the game and won a quiet, decent, rich man.

Mrs. Harry was black-eyed, raven-haired, slim, unscrupulous, and loved excitement. She was carelessly cynical and audaciously deceptive.

"Why," she demanded, "shouldn't Harry believe me? I'm a good liar."

Guinnell drifted gaily through the crowd, answering greetings and jests. He was well known. Always amiable and never silly, willing to enter into any game or sport, playing well but seldom winning, he seemed an ideal manikin for a hostess to have around.

Webster met him with the eager grasp of a stranger who has chanced on one person that he knows, then as Guinnell left him the middle-aged host resumed the shy half-grin of a man trying to pretend that he feels at home in his own house.

"Poor devil," said Guinnell. "He's too decent to be happy."

People were babbling and milling about under the lights and through shadows.

The orchestra played a tom-tom variation and on the low open-air stage a girl hopped and wriggled through a dance supposed to resemble that with which African cannibals prepared their dinners. Mrs. Harry liked bizarre stunts. The girl wore a black mask with frightful negroid features; and she had on barbaric anklets that rattled, a girdle of plaited grass and carried a spear.

Guinnell was at first uninterested, then he pushed and edged in more closely, staring hard.

That girl's hair was red, blazingly, copperishly red.

He asked right and left who she was. No one knew.

He edged to the outskirts of the crowd and began looking for Mrs. Harry, whom no one had seen for some time.

A broad-breasted heavy old woman, waddling along the path, answered his inquiry with:

"Know where she is? Wherever Trevelyan Ford is, of course!"

The woman laughed hoarsely at her own jest and went on, puffing from the tightness of her dress.

Trevelyan Ford was of a good family, but the family had long been tired of him. He was over thirty-five, agreeable, irresponsible, dissipated, and always more or less in debt. It was whispered that he had lately forged his brother's name, and the weary brother out of a family feeling had given him the choice of restoring the money or of going to prison.

The orchestra stopped jazzing. People clapped languidly. Guinnell glanced back. The girl was bowing, but she did not unmask. She stepped quickly from the stage, threw a cloak over her and started for the house.

He guessed that through being in the house to prepare for the entertainment she had got a chance at the necklace and taken it. She had known where to pawn it; and she had been cool enough to sign Mrs. Harrison Webster's name.

Brokers are familiar with the way that women cry "Thief!" to cover the disappearance of something they have pawned, and he said to himself that this girl had cleverly intended that some such suspicion might be fastened on Mrs. Webster when the theft was announced.

He thought—

"With a girl like that a fellow could steal the earth and get away with it."

Guinnell was standing in the shadow of a wisteria arbor when a hand was thrust under his arm and patted him with careless affection as Mrs. Harry said:

"Poutin' or prowlin'? Here all by yourself—shameful! Is my party so dull?"

There were lanterns overhead, but they were not burning, and Guinnell thought he heard the stealthy retreat of heavy footsteps out of the shadows from which Mrs. Harry had come.

She wore a tight-fitting dress of black net, glittering with colored scales; and the serpentine effect was increased by the sleekness of her hair topped with a black aigret and the narrowed, up-turned eyebrows. Black tulle was wound about her throat. She looked wilfully devilish, capable of any sinister thing.

"Great party," said Guinnell. "And great cannibal maid. Who is——"

"Come with me," said Mrs. Harry, pulling him along. "I'll tell you something. That dancer—did you like her stunt?"

"Immense!"

"Her last dance is *L'Apache* and police in uniform—I insisted on the uniform—are to arrest her."

"Oh, great!" said Guinnell, clapping his hands. "Everybody will think it real."

"No. Everybody will think it a clever stunt and look bored. It will be real."

"Real!"

"I couldn't lose the chance—have her arrested in plain sight of everybody. Besides, she's a good dancer. I couldn't spoil my program. She'll be a surprized woman, I can tell you! Anybody tries to get the best of me——"

Mrs. Harry snapped her sharp little teeth.

"But what has this red-haired——"

"She hennas it," said Mrs. Harry viciously. "And she is a thief. My necklace—one of Harry's heirlooms. Couldn't spoil my party over a paltry necklace. I said nothing. Let her think she was getting away with it; but I put *L'Apaché* last on the program. It's the worst—best—whichever you like—and called for the police."

Mrs. Harry led him through groups and down the walk. If he paused, she pulled. He wanted to get away from her and meditate; but she had fastened on to him and at last, with her arm through his, came face to face with Harrison Webster.

"Oh, Harry, where have you been? Mr. Guinnell and I have been together this whole hour looking all over for you—Oh, there, I must see that woman."

And Mrs. Harry darted away, leaving two uncomfortable men eying each other. A clever woman, Mrs. Harry. She had deftly established an alibi which she knew Guinnell was too much the gentleman to repudiate. But it had been only a few minutes since the men had exchanged greetings and each was wondering what the other thought of her deception.

Harrison Webster held out his cigaret-case.

"Thanks," said Guinnell, getting out the matches.

"Pleasant evening," said Webster.

"Very," said Guinnell heartily.

"Time goes quickly," said Webster, inhaling deeply.

"Doesn't it!" said Guinnell, exhaling slowly.

"Let's go have a drink. I need it."

He laid a friendly hand on Guinnell's shoulder and they went into the house.

"Come this way. Keep it up-stairs in my room—small stone bottle. Fifty-year-old Bourbon. I'm a bit selfish about it."

"You're prodigally generous to mention it."

ON THE stairs they met a tall man with a bushy head and a full, flabby face. His eyes were a lusterless blue. He walked with just a suggestion of jerky stiffness and bowed slightly as he passed.

Webster went on without a sign or word. At the top of the stairs he turned abruptly and grasped Guinnell's arm.

"What ought I to have done?" he asked tensely. "Did you ever see such—such *nerve!* It didn't faze him. As if he had a right to be up here—in my house!"

"I thought he looked a little shaky, old man."

"Guinnell?"

"Yes."

"I want to know—I've got to know! But I can't be a spy or hire such a thing. Tell me honestly, what do you think about Trevelyan Ford?"

"He's just a bum that happens to have a dress suit."

"Maybe he was up here to see Zozomee."

"Who?"

"That dancer. She's using that room—dressing-room. Why else was he up here?" Webster was almost pathetic in his hopefulness. He wanted any explanation but the one in which he had faith.

Guinnell said:

"Go to your room and wait. I'll find out. Tell her I'm looking for Ford. Has she seen him?"

Webster pressed his hand gratefully and hurried off.

"Poor devil," said Guinnell. "The more sorry I am the less I like him."

He looked up and down the hall, knocked, then listened and heard movement and voices.

A matronly woman in a maid's cap and apron opened the door and eyed him with cool inquiry.

"I must speak to Miss Zozomee at once, alone. It is of extreme importance."

The matronly woman was unimpressed. She seemed to know all about the importance of rush messages from strange young men.

"Zozomee," said the maternal maid with great coolness, "will see no one. I can take your message."

This woman, who plainly had none of the bribable weaknesses usually found in maids, was suspicious and impatient.

"Tell her," he said rapidly, "it is known that Mrs. Harrison Webster did *not* visit a pawnbroker today."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Miss Zozomee will understand—perfectly."

His earnestness impressed her. She asked—

"You refer to Kase and the necklace?"

"Yes," said Guinnell, surprized at her directness.

"Come in," said the woman, opening the door wide and closing it gently as he came through.

She said, "Wait," and left him.

She crossed the room to Zozomee, who sat before a mirror and was leaning a little to one side to catch his reflection.

At first the room appeared to Guinnell to be in a litter of dresses and feminine things overflowing from opened boxes and trunks, but he had no attention for anything but Zozomee, who kept her back to him. The shimmering hair fell free across the embroidered blue dressing-gown.

The matronly voice was saying in a half-whisper—

"Some kind of trouble, I know—that necklace—I warned you."

Zozomee stood up and turned. Guinnell felt that he was seeing her for the first time. Erect and graceful she swept toward him, and was not affected or embarrassed. Her eyes were direct. There was not a shade of excitement in her manner. She was a glorious woman.

"I do not understand what is the trouble," she said simply.

Her voice was smooth, pleasant. She seemed younger than he had thought and more beautiful.

Guinnell was lost. He did not want to be cool and cautious. By nature he was impulsive; also audacious. He wanted to prove himself a dependable friend and have her gratitude. Explanations could follow then. There was now no time.

"Listen. That necklace—Mrs. Harry knows. The police will grab you after the last dance. *L'Apache.* Take it easy. Treat it as a joke—part of the entertainment. Put it in the bill. I'll fix it some way so you'll get clear and see you tonight again. I can't stop now——"

Zozomee and the matronly maid exchanged amazed glances; then Zozomee said—

"I don't in the least understand what you are talking about!"

He smiled reassuringly.

"I don't blame you. But you will, after *L'Apache!*"

"But Mrs. Webster herself——"

"Listen. Mrs. Harry would do anything to make a Roman holiday or a guest giggle. She's planned it all. I'll see you again. I must go."

He bowed to Zozomee; he bowed to the matronly maid and left them wholly mystified and half-alarmed, staring at each other, as he slipped through the door.

In the hall he met Webster, excited, even pleased.

"I say, Guinnell, it's all right. The Bourbon's nearly gone. Ford was after that. I feel better. I can't tell you how much better I feel!"

"*Whew!*" said Guinnell. "You're ready to raise the roof over suspected petty larceny but forgive the man who drinks your Bourbon!"

"I don't understand," said Webster.

"I don't either," said Guinnell.

Five minutes later Guinnell had slipped down the street to where his low-slung, high-power roadster was parked and he drove rapidly away, heading for the Dunkart Block.

GUINNELL stealthily approached the door marked "Private." A dim line of light lay under it, but he had heard voices in the manufacturing jeweler's. It was there that the old "fence" changed and reshaped almost beyond possible identification much of the loot brought to him.

Guinnell slipped quickly into the little dirty room. He did not even glance at the big safe. That was for detectives, who came to look over the pawned articles and see if they recognized anything reported stolen.

He pressed a spring that dislodged the window-sill, reached among the king's ransom that was carelessly strewn there, picked

out the old-fashioned necklace and made off, leaving nothing disturbed.

"This way saves argument," said Guinnell. "Particularly as Kase doesn't know that I know about his private treasure-chest."

There was no time to be lost and the roadster zipped all the way back to the Harrison Websters'.

THE servant who got ten dollars and the convincing assurance that it would be all right, for tying an oil-soaked rag on to a pole and holding it out over the front porch just as Zozomee was about to begin the last dance, thought himself very well paid and enjoyed the excitement that he caused. It lasted about a half-minute. Everybody had a head up in the air, gaping.

"What is that man doing?" Mrs. Harry half-screamed, her face upturned tensely.

Guinnell was not looking at the flare. He was probably the only person on the lawn who had not jerked his head back as if by a spring. His fingers were deftly touching the streams of black tulle that flowed and sprayed around her throat as he answered—

"Shall I go find out?"

"Do, Bob. Do, please. I can't imagine——"

The torch swiftly burned to a red glow. People began chattering, some with wonder as to what it meant; others forgot it as soon as their eyes were turned away.

The orchestra returned to a preparatory thumming and strumming.

Zozomee, enveloped in a long robe and wearing a narrow silken mask, came to the stage steps and waited.

Guinnell passed close by her and spoke without pausing. She turned sharply and looked after him with an expression of wonderment not wholly concealed by the half-mask.

He noticed two policemen standing near Mrs. Harry. They watched her as if awaiting a signal.

Guinnell, who had not been anywhere near the servant, said to her:

"Some guest got him to do it as a stunt. A little impromptu fireworks. He's one of the men the caterer brought, so I don't suppose it 'd do any good to fire him."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Harry, "it gave this bunch something to rubber at for a minute. That's something. That's a whole lot! I'll say that's a lot when you've got the scenery cluttered up with a crowd that'll try to look bored at the last big act when Gabriel plays a trump!"

The orchestra broke loose with a blare that died away into a sinister creepy motif suggestive of midnight assassins on the prowl, and a lithe form in blouse and skirt crept stealthily on to the platform.

Zozomee carried a dagger of remarkable length; and some who saw it shivered for they didn't know that it was made of rubber. Her hair had been caught up under the large cap affected by the Parisian underworld.

She glided and whirled with sinuous turn and twist and more than one person remarked that she looked the part, which was that of a wise, wicked, wild woman. She went through a pantomime of beseeching, seducing, quarreling with and finally murdering her lover.

Guinnell was thrilled.

The dance came to an end with Zozomee drawing furtively backward from the invisible body of the imaginary dead; and she backed into the policemen who had come on to the stage.

At first it looked like a part of the act, a harshly inartistic effort to make the ending sensational.

Zozomee wheeled and faced them indignantly.

"What's the meaning of this?" she exclaimed. But she was not theatrical about it, so people who heard felt disappointed and thought her a poor actor.

"Sorry, miss," said one of the huskies, "but you are charged with stealin' Mrs. Webster's necklace."

An audible gasp and buzzing mutter went over the crowd. Art is great, but one little touch of the real thing widens eyes, opens mouths, stirs the pulse.

"Of stealing!"

"Yes," said both policemen.

"A necklace?"

One policeman grunted and the other nodded.

"What kind of a necklace?"

The men looked down helplessly toward Mrs. Webster.

She stood slim, sleek and black with Guinnell and her husband beside her. Mrs. Harry made no sign and said nothing, but watched like the most curious. This was

being good. She had given her guests a jolt at last.

"Is it supposed," said Zozomee, following the eyes of the policemen and looking at Mrs. Harry, "that I took an old-fashioned necklace of coral and a rose diamond pendant?"

"You see how well she knows it," said Mrs. Harry carelessly.

"I don't understand—" Mr. Webster began, gazing at his wife, rather dazed.

"*Shh-sh,*" Guinnell whispered. "Maybe it's part of the show."

Zozomee's voice was distinct and clear and vibrant with repressed anger.

"Certainly Mrs. Webster, you are playing a strange joke since you now wear the necklace I am accused of stealing!"

"That's just what *I* thought," said Webster wonderingly to Guinnell.

Without more ado Zozomee walked between the policemen, snatched up her cloak and scurried through the crowd.

No one paid attention to her. She was the winner. Every one could see that for every one's face had turned toward Mrs. Harry, whose fingers lifted mechanically to her throat where under the filmy tulle they fell upon the necklace supposed to be in the safe of Casper P. Kase; and Mrs. Harry looked as if she was dropping through space without the faintest idea of where she would land.

But she came down lightly as a cat, on her feet and with a laugh.

"The joke is on me," she cried. "Zozomee has a magic act I made fun of at rehearsal and wouldn't let her use tonight. I thought she'd really stolen that—this necklace. I'll say she's good!"

People smiled and jested gaily. Guinnell almost believed her himself.

"And I'll say *she* is good!" he muttered.

The orchestra struck up. Waiters appeared with trays of sandwiches, dishes of ice and drinks. People are happy when they eat. The party became quite cheerful.

Guinnell, closely observant, caught Mrs. Harry's whisper as she passed Ford.

"Can you beat it? Wait for me in the arbor. I'll get away from here soon as I can."

GUINNELL, used to taking chances of one kind and another, watched for the opportunity to get up-stairs unobserved and used it.

This time when Zozomee's door opened he was asked inside at once. Both women stared at him gratefully as they poured out questions.

"My mother," said Zozomee.

Guinnell was a bit staggered and bowed low. It was a surprize to find Zozomee under maternal care; but of course even a thief may have a mother.

"Now," he said cheerfully, smiling from one to the other, "now how would it be to take that necklace from her—again?"

"But," said the mother, "Mrs. Webster gave my daughter that necklace—to pawn for her."

"Er—I say—what's that?" Guinnell demanded.

"That's why I signed her name. She told me to," said Zozomee, whose unprofessional name was Grace McHenry.

"But," he cried, "Kase is a crook, a fence! How did——"

"Mrs. Webster told me to go there. Trevelyan Ford told her."

"Ah!" said Guinnell, rather dazed but beginning to see light.

He realized that these were innocent, simple folk who knew no more about stealing than he did of foreign missions.

Miss McHenry was a young artist just emerging with a bizarre name from years of hard preparatory work. Every engagement meant a great deal to her. She needed friends. That was why she had been willing to accommodate Mrs. Webster by doing an errand.

"You have the pawn-ticket yet, haven't you?"

"Yes. She asked me to keep it. Tomorrow she said she would send for the necklace."

"I thought so," said Guinnell.

He understood. Mrs. Harry would stop at nothing. She needed money—two thousand eight hundred dollars to keep Ford out of jail. The matter of ruining the girl's life did not trouble Mrs. Harry at all.

"She accused you of stealing it. The pawn-ticket would have been found in your hands. Kase would have had to give up the necklace. Very simple. She would have both the money and the necklace. You, Kase and the police would then settle matters among yourselves as best you could. I'll take that pawn-ticket if I may."

Both women were horrified, as they well might be.

"How fortunate," said Mrs. McHenry,

"that you knew Grace was innocent. You are a detective, Mr. Guinnell?"

"A de—no, not quite that. I am—well—you see—in a way it might be said that I direct detectives, at least influence them in their work."

"I see," said Mrs. McHenry. "A superintendent. You put it modestly."

Guinnell bowed.

Zozomee, even more lovely as Grace McHenry, looked at him with wide-eyed admiration. As by a miracle he seemed to have snatched her from a ruinous situation and she was grateful; more than that, she had become aware that he was a remarkably polite young man of fine appearance. She glanced with shy inquiry at her mother. The mother was very strict and reserved in her approval of young men.

"I don't understand how you knew—" said Mrs. McHenry.

"Don't try to guess," said Guinnell, interrupting with a graceful air of mystification. "There is much more implicated in the affair of the necklace than I can tell you now. Of course, I knew from the first that Miss McHenry was innocent."

"Of course," said the mother.

"Won't you some time tell us all about it?" asked Miss McHenry, glancing hopefully at her mother.

"Yes, do," said Mrs. McHenry.

"I have always admired detectives," Miss McHenry remarked. "And it seems to me we really hav a right to be told, some time. I shall always be grateful to you, Mr. Guinnell. I feel very like charging Mrs. Webster with slander."

"No—no," said Guinnell quickly, confidentially. "That would not do now. Trust me in this, please, and do not speak to her at all. You will punish her sufficiently by silence; if by saying nothing at all, explaining nothing. I will see that—well, she will be punished severely."

"I do not understand," said Mrs. McHenry.

"Please don't try—now. But trust me. Just trust me."

"Of course we do that implicitly!" said Miss McHenry, smiling trustfully.

"Thank you," said Guinnell; and a half-minute later he was out of the room and wiping his forehead.

"*Whew!*" he thought emphatically. "I nearly made a mistake—a great mistake. I would have sworn that she stole that necklace. *Whew!* And she is a wonderful girl. And will Kase believe that necklace walked off on its own two legs? Casper P. Kase is very careful about what he believes. He will add two and two, and being of an excitable nature, he may say something to hurt my feelings."

So Guinnell went down on to the lawn, slipped into the shadows, made his way noiselessly under the arbor of spreading wisteria that dropped at a thousand points with clusters of blooms, until he heard voices whispering together.

"Who's there?" a woman exclaimed tensely.

"Ze frien' of *madame's* an' *monsieur's!*" whispered Guinnell in a disguised voice.

A small flashlight blazed into their faces. A dark little automatic was extended.

"Pardon—an' keep silent," said the thin foreign voice, as a hand deftly went into Trevelyan Ford's pocket and drew out a rather bulky wallet.

"Ah—zat a lovely *la vallière,*" said the bandit, who wore a full mask of white silk that gave an almost spectral appearance.

With one gesture and a light dextrous touch he had removed the necklace.

The flashlight went out.

"Please, you will not move or make ze shout. Madame's husband might be ze first to hear an' come queek!"

With that the mysterious masked figure backed away into the shadows and was gone.

GUINNELL held a cup of coffee in his hand—a hand steady and delicate as a fragment of statuary—as he sat among a group of guests, listening to the last piece of the orchestra. He seemed thoughtfully attentive to the music, but he was thinking:

"I feel like a dog, a dirty, little yellow dog. A girl like that—and I hoped she was a crook! Framed her alibi so she could get clear and I could get her for a partner. I'm a winner, a way-ahead winner. But this crook game doesn't pay; not when you meet a girl like that."

Hooley's Hen Hastener

by Charles Tenney Jackson

Author of "A Little Jigger this Mornin'," "Half-Pint Smith," etc.

"LISTEN," said the lunatic cheerfully, sitting down on top of the unfinished wall around the sanitarium of the good Doctor Freihut. "I'm crazy, but I know it; people outside are crazy and don't know it. F'r instance, here's my family payin' Doc forty dollars a week to keep me here, cuttin' the grass and milkin' the cows and buildin' this everlastin' stone wall around the farm just like all the other nuts.

"Say, Doc's got millionaires up in his cottage-colony tendin' his chickens and hoein' his cabbage and payin' him a hundred a week for the chance. 'Fresh air,' says Doc, 'and calm sleep and beautiful thoughts, and some shower-baths and plenty o' outdoor work on my farm,' says Doc, 'and bills paid in advance, and I can cure any nut livin'!' "

"It's wonderful," murmured J. Watts-Wright, looking across the amazing lawns and gardens of the good doctor to the buildings beyond. "I'd start one myself if I could get a few of you nuts over to my place for nest-eggs. Don't any of you guys take a notion to run off?"

"What for? Doc gets all our money in advance. I'm paid up three months, so I got to be crazy that long anyhow, just to bust even."

Young Mr. Watts-Wright looked at Mr. Fraley searchingly. Then he perused the card in his hand:

"Insitute of Mental Hygiene and Naturopath Therapeutics. Adolph Freihut, M.D., Ph.D.," he mused. "Say, Fraley, I don't mind tellin' you I'd like to get in there!"

"Hop in," commented Mr. Fraley, tapping his trowel on his foot. "Doc'll have you doin' chores in no time. I'm a ward patient, and a young man with money like you would be in the cottage bunch, but you'd have to go out and hoe garden truck. That's this celebrated nature-cure of hisn."

"He's ruined this little old village," went on young Mr. Watts-Wright. "Arden would be one of the niftiest Summer resorts in the State if it wasn't known from New York to San Francisco as the home of Freihut's bug colony. No wonder folks hate him; there ought to be a big hotel right here on my property with mineral springs and river-views, but what can you do? Say, if you mention anywhere that you live at Arden, people begin to grin and make funny cracks. I been away six years and now, when I come home, I find Doc's grabbed everything."

" 'The great bammy heart o' Nature,' says Doc, 'and useful labor; peace in y'r soul and blisters on y'r hands'll take the kinks out of any nut.' So he keeps on buyin' real estate and gets it all improved free, *gratis* f'r nothin', and swell bugs are clamorin' to pay him f'r the chance."

"Say, don't any of 'em ever yell?" inquired J. Watts-Wright suddenly.

"Yell?"

"Yes—yip and ki-yi foolishly?"

"One yip," asserted Mr. Fraley emphatically, "and Doc packs 'em off home. And

they don't get their money back either. And he's got a yip-house, too, in the basement, if anybody has a fit and hollers. Old Lady Mahaffy stood at the winder once and screeched at some folks passin' in an automobile, and Doc sent f'r her folks to take her away.

"If any nut here feels like yellin', Doc reads him a chapter out of his book, 'Worry.' Then Doc sells him the book for six dollars. The nut tries to read a chapter o' 'Worry,' and he goes plumb asleep, and then he wakes up the next mornin' ca'm and peaceful and goes to buildin' fence f'r Doc, or somethin'."

"Gosh, look over at my place," pursued Mr. Watts-Wright absently. "Fences all down and weeds growing up. Then look at Doc's place. He's been trying to buy our old family home ever since my old man died, but the family would rise in their graves if I sold out to him."

"A half-dozen of Doc's husky bats could shingle y'r house and paint the barn and clean up the yard in no time. Sunshine, fresh air, plenty o' work, and read a chapter o' 'Worry' a day, and——"

"Say," put in Watts-Wright, as if illumined by a gleam that had been struggling under the murky interest that held him strangely to Mr. Fraley. "Do you know you look remarkably like me?"

Mr. Fraley considered.

"Well, I'm kind o' more stooped in the shoulders than you."

"And you're some years older than me——"

"Well, I been takin' Nature's bammy cure. Mebbe that's why I look that way."

"You got the same features and hair, only a little thin!" exclaimed Mr. Watts-Wright eagerly. "And pretty near my build!"

"Doggone if you ain't pretty near right, Mr. Wright. And I understand you're about the richest young man around here, too."

"Oh, that isn't it. I just came back here unknown to any one after six years abroad and found the old town about the same—river still runs under Main Street bridge and Doc Freihut still bullin' the town trustees into handin' him everything that isn't nailed down. I always was sore on that infernal old 'don't worry' buzzard, and I'd like to get him. And especially since he's got poor old Dippy McGuire in his buzz-shop.

"Bill McGuire, Yale, Engineering; the class with me. We hooked out of college together and went into service together. And we came back together, only Bill, the Dip, went in for commerical aviation, being that he was one of the big aces Over There. And then four months ago he took an awful spill up in Syracuse at some county fair and woke up a trifle woggy."

Young Mr. Watts-Wright bent his swagger-stick a bit and looked anxiously at Mr. Fraley.

"Say," he went on meaningly, "are you getting all this?"

"Go ahead," retorted Mr. Fraley. "I ain't crazy except about hens; that's why Doc keeps me away from his chickens."

"Well, there's no hens in this, but there's a chicken. She's about nineteen and five feet, four——"

"Hold on!" yelled Mr. Fraley, arising from the stone fence agitatedly. "That was what Hooley said!"

"Hooley?"

"Oh, Lordy!" Mr. Fraley sat down and glanced back to the big house under the trees where a patient or two and an attendant could be seen. "Hooley said I could raise 'em that way, but he's a liar!"

"Who—? Hooley?" gasped Mr. Watts-Wright. "Who's Hooley?"

"Listen," said Mr. Fraley mysteriously. "I can't tell these nuts on this place about Hooley because none of 'em'll listen. But listen——"

He came closer and took young Mr. Watts-Wright by the lapel.

"Listen—I was an honest, well-meanin' sort of rube raisin' chickens four miles east of Dogwood post-office when I gets mixed up with this Hooley. Hooley—H. Hooley, lock-box 234, Yonkers, N. Y. Get that?"

"Sure, I get that. But let go my sleeve!"

" 'T's'll right! Hooley advertises some dope that'd mean millions in chickens. He gets me in correspondence tryin' to understand his system and I digs up a hundred dollars in that chicken-raisin' course. D'ye hear me? Hooley says there's a great waste o' time and nervous energy about hens. Hens, he says, can do more bluffin' and stallin' about their durn eggs than any critters alive. He wrote me that the amount of cackling they do over one cussed egg and then the amount of time they stand around doin' nothing is why eggs is so high. He sells me some dope that he guaranteed'd

make my hens lay three eggs at a time, and when it came to settin', Hooley said his stuff would hatch 'em in a week."

"Hold on," said young Mr. Watts-Wright, removing Mr. Fraley's hand from his arm. "I was going to ask you to help me with Dippy McGuire, but I see——"

"Listen." Mr. Fraley's voice trembled more mysteriously. "Punch, pep and precision was what hens needed, Hooley wrote, and he was going to revolutionize the chicken business."

"Neve' mind," urged Mr. Watts-Wright soothingly. "It's all right!"

"Of course it's all right. Hooley done me dirt but I'd made it work if the neighbors'd let me alone. But they began to talk, and so I landed up in a bug-house. It was the mile walks I give 'em that got me in bad."

"Who? Your neighbors?"

"No—my hens. That was part of the Hooley system. Give 'em a shot of Hooley's Hen Hastener and then walk 'em a mile before breakfast. That's what put me in this bug-joint. You can't hardly ever get forty-two cross-barred Plymouth Rock hens to walk a mile in a straight line, and when they saw me tryin' it they had me pinched."

"I guess so! Oh, I better be goin' now. I'll try some other plan for Dippy."

"Listen——"

Mr. Fraley backed Mr. Watts-Wright against the good doctor's sanitarium wall. "You try it. You shoot a little syringeful o' Hen Hastener into a chicken and then try——"

"GOOD NIGHT," murmured young Mr. Watts-Wright. "'Ray for Hooley! 'Ray for the hens! Leggo me!"

He backed off and then stopped.

"Why this chicken-parade, hey, Fraley?"

"Drumsticks!" said Mr. Fraley solemnly. "Hooley said him and me was goin' to develop a new breed o' chickens if I'd finish his correspondence course. He said think o' the youth of the land and the way they liked drumsticks. He said what happened when an average decent American family had chicken dinner? Why, the old folks got all the breast-meat and good stuff and the kids got the legs. And was there ever enough to go round? No—never!"

"Say, man, I got to get back to my hotel——"

"Wait a minute. Hooley said a three-legged chicken built like a milk-stool would help some, and he got me to broodin' about it. Then he wrote me that the only practical way was to develop their underpinnin'. He said that by proper exercise and a shot o' Hen Hastener and beginnin' on 'em easy with sprints until they could do a mile, there wasn't any reason why hens shouldn't have legs thirty inches'n more. Ham-chickens, says Hooley, is what is needed; think o' young America gittin' nothin' but measly drumsticks because the old folks git all the white meat. The high cost of livin', says Hooley, an' patriotism an' everythin' calls on us to breed these yere ham-chickens and speed 'em up to three eggs a day with his Hen Hastener."

"Can it be possible," murmured young Mr. Watts-Wright, "that Hooley was kiddin' you? Once in my salad days——"

"It can be done," responded Mr. Fraley. "I studied it and bought five cases o' Hen Hastener. Everything was all right till one day, tryin' to walk them hens to exercise the dope into their systems, I had a thought and went *flooey!*"

"Yea, boy," said young Mr. Watts-Wright gently. "Illumine me!"

"S'posen I did raise chickens with ham-legs thirty inches long, how'n granny c'd they set on their eggs an' hatch 'em?"

Young Mr. Watts-Wright looked at Mr. Fraley, eye to eye. He sighed. Mr. Fraley sighed. They even shook their heads together.

"I guv one yell out there in the road," reflected Mr. Fraley, "and some folks run f'r the constable. Down here Doc says I'm all right—except I got to be kept away from chickens."

"You make me think of Dippy Bill McGuire," sighed Mr. Watts-Wright. "I stayed up many a night keeping Bill away from chickens. Ah, of course they couldn't hatch 'em unless eggs came high, too."

Mingled doubt and hope was in Mr. Fraley's eye.

"It can be done. I got to broodin' and I took a couple o' shots of Hen Hastener myself one time. Can't say it did me any harm, but I feel different down in my system."

"Oh, happy day! Dippy should meet you! And say—" Mr. Watts-Wright suddenly grasped Mr. Fraley by the shoulders and looked him firmly in the eye. "See

here, I'll put something to you. I got to get myself in there unknown to any one and slip one little word into Dippy's ear. Understand? Nobody but me can do it. See? They're railroading him, understand? And there's five millions dollars goin' to his Cousin Meigs if the Meigs family can get Dippy declared permanently locoed. And his girl, Fraley, absolutely the best ever, is implorin' me to save him."

"What's the matter with Dippy? Can't he hatch 'em?"

"Hush—there's some big stiff strollin' this way. I don't want him to see how astonishingly you and me look like each other."

" 'T's'll right. Doc's off on some real-estate deal, the superintendent is playin' golf, the matron's at a picture-show and the yardmen are playin' pinocle while the nuts cut the grass. Everythin's lovely."

"Look here, Fraley, can you go up town, slide in the hotel, talk to a couple of guys if they horn in, wear my clothes and not bat an eye over it—just for twenty-four hours to be J. Watts-Wright of New York and Arden farm and—oh, a lot of places?"

"If they ain't any chickens in it——"

"Of course not! There's a couple of plain-clothes men trailin' me around at a distance, but if they see you at the hotel they'll be satisfied. And I'll husk into your clothes and hunt up Dippy McGuire!"

Mr. Fraley chuckled.

" 'T's all right! And if any attendant or dinin'-room man or doctor or one of the nuts comes near you, just start in and tell him about Hooley. Yeh'll have the whole place to yourself, because for a month I been tellin' 'em about Hooley, but they won't listen. Now, listen——"

"Neve' mind! You told it once. How'll I find Dippy McGuire?"

"A swell nut like that'll be in one of the cottages. If he's vi'lent he'll be in the yip-house—main buildin', east wing. Doc won't take squealers here unless they got a lot of money. Is Dippy a bad bat?"

"He's not batty at all—just oozled a bit from sideslippin' four thousand feet and into a convent tennis-court, that's where he met her."

"Well, I may be crazy but I ain't fool enough to tumble into a convent in an airplane."

"When it comes to bugs," said young Mr. Watts-Wright impressively, "you aren't in it with what Dippy was in his soph year. He's the lad that wrote the 'Habitat of the Tabby Cat' for the natural history section. I shouldn't wonder if he knows Hooley, the hen-expert."

Mr. Fraley regarded him narrowly.

"If I thought so I'd help you."

"Take a chance," said Mr. Watts-Wright placidly. "I'll give you five hundred just to take your place in there tonight. On five hundred you could stay at Doc's three months longer."

"Maybe then I'd get this hen proposition worked out," muttered Mr. Fraley hopefully.

"I know you would," encouraged young Mr. Watts-Wright cheerily. "Come on now, get behind the bushes and try on my coat. There's a chap strollin' this way."

"Doc's yard-attendants don't bother a nut much unless he's got a lot of money," volunteered Mr. Fraley. "You got to be in the building for the night check-up and to supper. Say, your coat fits me fine."

"You'll look like a Kickkenheimer clothes ad with this stuff, Fraley. Now take my stick and stroll into town as if you owned it. Don't let any chickens fall for you now."

"Hey?"

"Don't let any dame pick you up. Easy on the talk. Tell the room-clerk when you get the keys that you guess you'll turn in. These two private sleuths that the Meigs crowd put on to me to see if I'm workin' in Dippy's interests will take things easy after they see you're in your room."

And presently Mr. Watts-Wright stood forth in Mr. Fraley's frayed hand-me-down suit, his Scotch cap and worn shoes. He stared at the other.

"Honest, you'd pass on Forty-second Street," he murmured. "Oh, Sportol"

Mr. Fraley languidly snapped open Mr. Watts-Wright's gold cigaret-case, lighted one and flicked the ash from his sleeve.

"That certain air of elegance," murmured Watts-Wright joyously. "Fraley, old dear, who's your tailor?"

Mr. Fraley bent his thin stick nonchalantly.

"I'd git nervous if they had chicken f'r dinner at the hotel," he answered. "Doc says I'm sound as a bean if nobody suggests hens to me. Say, did I ever tell you about Hooley? Listen——"

Young Mr. Watts-Wright had slid over the fence. The burly person up under the trees was bawling loudly:

"All in! All in!"

"'T's'll right. That means clear the grounds and go in f'r supper. You just sorteh stroll in, readin' out of that 'Worry' book in yer pocket. And start on hens if anybody talks to you. They gits disgusted and quits."

MR. WATTS-WRIGHT waved a smiling good-by. He presently joined a group of quiet individuals and followed cautiously. In the big bare dormitory dining-room he found a seat easily and propped up his "Worry" against a pitcher. Somebody slapped a tin plate of food down over his shoulder. A moon-faced trusty was spilling gravy on his shoulder.

"Hey, rube! This ain't chicken—take some!"

"Beg pard— Oh, yeh! Listen——"

His neighbor to the right cracked him in the ribs sharply. Mr. Watts-Wright turned in some heat.

"Now, Fraley, cut out this hen stuff. The big chief'll have yeh up for 'nother examination——"

"Listen," said Mr. Watts-Wright cunningly. "This yere Hooley——"

"Oh, ferget it!"

The pie-faced person turned to the table-mates.

"Honest, this nut'll git us all crazy about Hooley!"

"Listen," pleaded Mr. Watts-Wright.

But all he got was glowering looks and silence. He was glad for that. Fraley had instructed him where he might make a few casual inquiries about Bill McGuire.

Mr. Watts-Wright was surprized at the homey atmosphere of the good doctor's place. The inmates played the piano, idled about, strolled on the veranda. A half-hour gave Mr. Watts-Wright all the gossip about Bill McGuire. He was the latest big card of the good doctor's and was carefully cared for in the east cottage with other patients who paid the top prices.

Mr. Watts-Wright made mental notes of the grounds and exits, followed to the dormitory when the retiring-bell rang, as one well-soothed and comforted by great Nature's healing course and building fences six hours for the good doctor.

"It's great to be crazy," murmured young Mr. Watts-Wright, as he pulled the sheet to his ears. "But I trust I'm the only bug in this bed."

"OH, YEH!" murmured Mr. Fraley boredly into the telephone in his suite at the Maddox House. "Mr. Watts-Wright— Oh, certainly!"

"That's good," broke out a throaty voice joyously in the booth down-stairs. "Gosh, when I seen in the evenin' papers that Mr. Watts-Wright was back in the old town agin', I said to Skip, 'Boy, this old show ain't busted yet!' I says, 'Watts-Wright'll do what's right, all right.' I says, 'Watty Wright'll remember how him and them college boys put my show on the blink once, an' I grins and tells 'em to cop the hull circus.' I says, 'Skip, bein' we're stranded here, Watty's the boy 'at'll stand by his frien's!'"

"Oh, yeh!" drawled Mr. Fraley dissimulatingly. "What'll it cost?"

The throaty voice laughed ingratiatingly.

"Oh, I knowed you'd say that! But it ain't so much the money; it's just findin' a home f'r the bunch temp'rarily, y'understan'? Y'see, Watty, my boy, Meta and me busted up, an' she grabbed half the show before I could git it over the State line. Meta Morel's Stupendous an' Unexampled Aggregation, Watty, 'cause Meta tried to hog it all, is split to a splinter. She even hollers because I took the three-legged calf, not seein' any fair ways to whack it even, a three-legged calf, y'understan', bein' more complicated than jes' veal-stew calves. Hey, Watty, remember how Meta gets sore on you college boys while me, I jes' grins an' laughs?"

"Oh, yeh?" murmured Mr. Fraley benignantly.

"Yes, sir, she goes to court and gits an injunction, but me and Skip hooks three cars on to the local freight and lands here with 'em. Meta got the big top an' most of the canvas, but I got the Igorot band and most of the animals. Trouble is, Mr. Watts-Wright, I had to unload 'em all in the yards and got to hustle feed and water; and the police yere, they won't let me use the old show-grounds f'r we ain't got any permit; and gosh knows you can't keep a high-bred giraffe, like Ethel, standin' up all night in the railroad-yards gittin' soot on her."

"Oh, certainly not!" put in Mr. Fraley with utter nonchalance.

"We never intended to give no show here," said the voice eagerly. "The big paper's all out f'r Meta Morel's Circus an'

Carnival at Leesburg tomorry, but Meta and me broke up, so that's off. And when Skip an' me had to unload here desperit-like, I picks up the evenin' paper and sees that you're back home again. I says to Skip: 'This boy is the big spear in this ol' town; and don't I remember Watty Wright when we shows in New Haven an' all them college boys come yippin' in and grabs the performance? Hey, wasn't I a good feller, though, and let Watty and Dip McGuire and all them rich boys kyoodle round all night, and somebody give a pint o' booze to Henry, the big monk, and he ain't ever been right since.'"

"Bring him up," responded Mr. Fraley interestedly. "Sunshine—fresh air, beautiful thoughts—the great bammy heart o' Nature, and buildin' fence and a chapter o' 'Worry'——"

"Oh, that's all right, kid me, Mr. Watty! But wasn't I the good sport though to stand f'r that New Haven rumpus, and Meta hollerin' f'r cops?"

"Oh, yaws," drawled Mr. Fraley. "Oh, certainly!"

"Well, now, can I camp 'em all down on your farm? Skip an' me jes' rushed out there; and say, it's great—all them unused barns and the big lots; and the old place all shut up, so we wouldn't hurt nothin'."

"It couldn't hurt nothin'," assented Mr. Fraley philanthropically.

"Say, it's grand 'at I can fix all this on the phone! We jes' got to get housed up somewhere quick. I jes' says to Skip, 'If I ever git a word to Watty Wright he'll do what's right.' Mebbe you'd like to come down and see us move an' give these small-town cops the laugh. The boys'll certainly give you the glad mitt—our big canvasman, Steve, ain't got through talkin' yet about how you laid him out with a bottle at the big college mix-up. And maybe you'd enjoy some o' the freaks."

"Freaks?" queried Mr. Fraley dispassionately. "Oh, yeh! Any—chickens?"

"Chickens?" gurgled Mr. Morel joyously. "Don't make me laugh! Time you git the grease paint off'n these old carnival buzzards they ain't much chicken. Oh, you Watty boy—I know you!"

Half an hour later, still with his certain air and a large black cigar, young Mr. Watts-Wright strolled through the hotel lobby and out to Main Street. A shifty-eyed man sitting behind a pillar arose and whispered to another, who smiled distantly.

"It's straight. He's adopted a circus. I just listened in on the phone. He ain't goin' to pull anything about McGuire tonight. The local chief just said he was glad this burg was dry and tight now, for in the old days Watty Wright never came home without stagin' a bust-up that was all they could handle. He ain't got his old week-end college gang along anyhow this trip."

A block down toward the railroad station, as young Mr. Watts-Wright was gazing interestedly at a mob of boys and spectators who were surging about some moving gas flares and high-wheeled gaudy wagons, a short, bull-necked young man in a striped sweater came stealthily alongside and plucked his sleeve.

"Watty, old scout, is it all right?"

"Oh, yeh!"

Watty gazed down at him blankly.

"Why, Watty, what you handin' us? We got the big car there waitin' for the jump-off. Did you get in to Dippy and wise him up?"

"Oh, yeh!"

Mr. Watts-Wright moved majestically onward.

The bull-necked young man stood staring blankly. Then he sidled back to the drug-store and whispered to a tall young man who was having a soda.

"Say, what's got into Watty? He looks like he was full of hop, give me the glassy eye and a once-over and slid on his way!"

"It's the cops," retorted the other youth. "They're watchin' for a frame-up, and Watty's wise to 'em. He said it was all set about Dippy, didn't he?"

"Yes. But, oh, Lordy, look what he's doin' now! Climbin' up in that —— band-wagon alongside that guy in the silk hat! Say, that coon band is startin' to play! Half-past eleven and Watty's leadin' a circus parade! Rise, rise, ye terriers, and give 'em the Boola! Watty's home again!"

"It can't be done on ice-cream soda!" whooped the other young man, "but lead the way! If poor old Dip was only with us!"

A moment more and Octavus Morel, the worser half of the now dismembered Meta Morel's One-Ring Circus and Carnival heard two distinct and glad yells down by the fore-wheel of the band-wagon, and two lusty young men were climbing up by force and violence among the Igorot bandsmen,

recruited at Memphis, Tennessee. Mr. Morel arose and doffed his top hat delightedly. By his side Mr. Watts-Wright looked composedly off over the now jeering multitude. The bandsmen broke into a happy jazz, and the two strangers roared approval. They beat Octavus Morel over the shoulders and slapped Watts-Wright on the knees and howled some more.

"Why, Slive Carter, don't you know me —Morel, that give you boys the big night——"

"Forget it!" yelled Slive. "Here's Petey, too, and Watty and—grovel, you base dogs down there on Main Street, and out of the way! But where do we go from here?"

"I dunno," grinned Mr. Morel, "but the cops told us to start!"

The happy young men looked back when the foremost wagon joggled past the hotel in the waver and glare of the gas flares which Mr. Morel's Senegambians had festively lighted for the occasion. Beyond the red and yellow chariot of state which conveyed the jazzing party came a wrinkled and diminutive elephant, led by a flat-footed son of Ham; a sooty giraffe, four frowzy ponies, a wagon of assorted monkeys; and three ostriches, with a keeper, closed up the cavalcade.

And from the joyous ebony-hued drum-major who strode ahead to the last tattered camp-follower of the Morel fortunes they all looked hungry and unwashed, but filled with a great and expectant hope as they turned fond and beaming eyes forward to young Mr. Watts-Wright, the angel. The word had gone swiftly about among the derelicts of Meta Morel's aggregation. Mr. Watts-Wright had taken them in; they were all going to eat, and their salaries were to be guaranteed and legal experts hired for their troubles; and even, if needful, the generous Mr. Watts-Wright would see that the untamed Igorot bandsmen got home to Memphis, Tennessee.

So it was a joyful and lusty smear of smoke and color and yells that defiled past the Maddox House and up Main Street to quiet suburbs. The village police chief shook his head wearily to one of the private sleuths who still looked warily after the procession.

"Don't worry, man—let 'em go! They ain't any permit for a parade, least of all at midnight, but once they get outside the town limits it's none of my funeral! Watty Wright belongs right where he is, leadin' a busted-down, ——-fool circus out to Freihut's nut factory, and I hope none of 'em ever comes back!"

"Well, he can't bother Dippy McGuire with all that yellin' goin' on," sighed the plain-clothes man wearily. "I guess we may as well turn in."

And they saw the last red smoke and heard the final yowl of the Igorot jazzmen from the leafy shades of the river-road; then silence.

"HIST—Dippy!"

Bill McGuire raised his head, smoothed his hair, lay back on the pillow and sighed.

"Now, I know I'm a bit off—for I just heard Watty Wright!"

"Dippy!"

"Eh? Where'n——"

"Under the bed, Dippy. Keep quiet."

"How'n —— you get under my bed? I'm in a sanitarium, by gee!"

"That's good."

Watty's head came cautiously up beside the pillow. He reached a hand to stroke Bill's in the dim light.

"I crawled in here, Dippy. I'm a nut, too, Bill."

"No, you ain't. Nuts belong in the dormitories. In this cottage bunch we're just patients; it depends on how much you pay, you see. How'd you get here, Watty?"

"Easy," whispered Watty. "I went to the wash-room, climbs out the fire-escape and sneaks over here and up through the kitchen. I had your room spotted right-o. Say, any nurses or anything around?"

"They're kind o' careless, Watty. But what'n thunder——"

"Neve' mind. We come to get you. Slive Carter and Petey got my big car down at the bridge. We're goin' to snake you over the State line, and Governor Jerrold'll never let Maryland authorities get you back. You remember Bob Jerrold, don't you—before our time—'98, I think, but—Slive and me and Helen Wilkinson framed it all up——"

"Helen?" Bill started under the covers. "Oh, Watty! She still cares for me?"

"Sure! You're all right. You been put upon, Bill, railroaded into this dump when you were still scrambled from that fall at Syracuse."

"Oh, Watty," said Bill wearily, "don't

worry me!" "Bill, you get into your duds and sneak while the sneakin's good!"

"I'm all right here, Watty. Just need a rest. Uncle Jim and Aunt Hattie Meigs said I just needed a long rest."

"You bet they did, Bill—they'd like you to get a good, long rest in some State institution if they can get Freihut and some other sharps to——"

"Don't make me laugh, Watty. It'll be a symptom. Everything a guy does in here is a symptom."

"Especially if he's got money."

Watty slipped a comforting arm about Bill's big shoulders.

"Now, come, you terrier! The gang's all here!"

"If I could just see 'em," moaned Bill weakly. "Slive an' you an' Petey an' one good old-time bust-up, an' I'd get my punch back again!"

Watty was gently disentangling Bill's legs from the bedding. He warped him around on the springs. Bill sat up in loud, silken-striped pajamas and scratched his ear worriedly.

"The attendant will be shovin' his face in here, Watty, in a minute, just to see if I'm sleepin' well."

"Get up! Kick out! All the matter with you is they been shootin' you full of some kind of hop and fresh air and beautiful thoughts. What you need, Bill, is dense, after-midnight, desperately polluted atmosphere, full of good tobacco smoke and the gang grinnin' at you."

"Yep. If I could only—Say, what's that, Watty? I hear a trombone."

"Hey?" Watty clutched anxiously after Bill, who had suddenly thrust his head out the window. "For —— sake, Bill, don't go dippy again!"

"Boola boola!" yelled Bill, a roar that rattled through every private room in rest cottage number two of the good doctor's establishment. "Boola boola! Boola boola."

"For the love of Hooley——"

"Look at 'em, Watty, turnin' in the drive, red fire and lunatics—Boola boola! Boo ——"

Through the leafy elms young Mr. Watts-Wright caught one gleam of gilded chariots. He saw a silk hat shining, and by it his own Leghorn straw planted firmly on the head of Mr. Fraley; while standing behind them, dancing joyously before a background of battered trombones, French horns and clarinets shaking syncopatingly, were Slive and Petey. And behind this equipage, all lighted by the black-faced torch-bearers strode a moth-eaten, undersized elephant, a skinny giraffe, three dilapidated ostriches and a cage of monkeys.

"——!" shrieked young Mr. Watts-Wright, tearing his hair. "Where did the fools find that outfit?"

"This way out!"

Dippy McGuire was roaring down the corridor. Two attendants came rushing from the stairs. One laid hands on Bill's Oriental pajama sleeve and was hurled headlong into his fellow.

"Boola boola!"

The attendants seized upon young Mr. Watts-Wright, skurrying after Bill's mighty rush such as made the telling touchdown against Harvard in 1912. Then they flung him aside.

"It's that cheap Hooley nut! Get McGuire, the big-money guy!"

Bill McGuire hurdled over a dotty old gentleman who staggered out of his chamber; upset two chattering dames who had ventured on the staircase, encountered the corpulent good Doctor Freihut at the front door, shoved him through the stained glass; and when Mr. Watts-Wright reached the lawn he saw Bill climbing on the band-wagon. The gleam of Bill's silken *robe de nuit* was over the lesser figures as he beat time for the jazz-men.

"They aren't stopping!" panted young Mr. Watts-Wright, and tore after the procession which was encircling the buildings and trailing off on the other drive. He dodged in between the Morel trained ostriches; and one glance back showed the porch light on, maddened night-attendants struggling with a swarm of yelling patients in the broken doorway, and good Doctor Freihut sitting weakly on the top step, holding his ears.

"Watty, old scout! Watty!"

"It ain't Watty! Watty's up there with Morel!"

"Watty all diked up like a nut! And Bill—Say, Slive, who'n —— have we got up'n the front seat there?"

Petey grabbed the figure in front of him.

"Where do we go from here?" chuckled Morel, reining his gaily caparisoned four. "Why, Watty, where——"

"Oh, yeh," rejoined Mr. Fraley, sepulchrally. "Hooley's right. It can be done."

Dippy McGuire had his back to the driver's seat. He was shaking his shoulders and enticing the Igorots into a new jazz syncopation. Watty shook him once in despair, then seized upon Morel.

"Get out of here! I say, Morel, down the bridge-road. Yes, it's all right, the dashed farm is yours, but you get out of these grounds, quick!"

"Why, Mr. Wright—Watty——"

"On your way! Slive, you beat it to my car. Get the blankets for Bill. I didn't think he'd make a getaway without any clothes. Morel——"

MOREL hurled his long whip to the lead horses' flanks. They sprang to a canter, and the band-wagon went on with a jerk that threw jarring notes of blasphemy back to the abode of sound sleep and beautiful thoughts.

"Quick!" implored young Mr. Watts-Wright. "It's all right, Morel; this nut's a good nut, but I'm Watty!"

"Oh, yeh!" put in Mr. Fraley placidly. "I'm all right, so's Hooley. It can be done."

And he stood up in the cavorting chariot, took off Mr. Watts-Wright's straw hat and beckoned triumphantly to the tail-end of the procession, which was wending slowly on among the trees. But the band-wagon went rumbling out across the bridge, and Slive Carter howled to Morel to stop just where a touring-car was hidden in the shrubbery.

"Say!" yelled Mr. Morel. "What's the matter with this bloke I thought was you? Minute he saw my blamed ostriches down at the depot he insisted on paradin' 'em up here, just had to show 'em to Freihut, and he kept singin' to 'imself, 'It can be done—it can be done!' "

Young Mr. Watts-Wright was mopping his brow, while he watched Slive Carter and Petey load big Bill McGuire into the motor-car.

"How you feelin', Bill?"

"Fine as pie. Neve' felt better. All I needed was a little punch——"

"Pep, punch and precision," said Mr. Fraley, standing up in the band-wagon beside Mr. Octavus Morel. "Oh, yeh, it can be done. I c'd walk them chickens a mile, an' prove it. Sound sleep an' beautiful thoughts an' a chapter o' 'Worry' a day an' a little shot o' Hen Hastener. Say, Mr. Wright, what'd I tell yeh? Look back at them three birds, leggin' it thirty-six inches to a stride, and tell me if ham-chickens ain't a possibility?"

"They am," retorted Mr. Watts-Wright.

He was reaching up to stuff a handful of bills into Mr. Morel's clutches.

"Oh, boy—sing it on high! Freihut won't have a payin' patient in his joint when their people hear about this! And, Morel, you better make it up with Meta about that three-legged calf business, and when you get the old show reorganized, take this harmless gink along to nurse your ostriches. Bill and us are beatin' it to the State line."

"It can be done," murmured Mr. Fraley pleasedly. "I'll tell the world so!"

THE OLD PROSPECTOR

BY E. E. HARRIMAN

LEAN and leathery, grizzled and gray,
Tough as a walrus strand;
Plodding along his weary way
Over the desert sand.

Grimed with the flux of an endless trail,
Calloused of hand and heel;
Ribbed by the beat of ill fortune's flail,
Lasting as hammered steel.

Silent and grim as the rocks he knows,
Death swinging low at his thigh;
Hope in his heart still undying glows,
Fortune's still fluttering nigh.

BELLE STARR—NOTED FEMALE DESPERADO

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

PROPERLY under this heading—although a woman—must be listed the name of the dashing, daring Belle Starr, "Queen of the Desperadoes," also known as the "Prairie Queen," leader of bandits, a dead shot, a most skilful horsewoman and possessed of all the nerve and coolness of any man in her class, and of whom it is said that more stories have been written (many of them false) than of any other woman in the United States.

Belle Starr, or Myra Belle Shirley, was born in Carthage, Missouri, February 3, 1846, and was murdered in 1889 on her forty-third birthday by an unknown assassin. Her people are said to have been wealthy Southerners; her father having been a judge of some distinction in the South.

DURING the Civil War, although yet in her teens, Belle Shirley acted as a Confederate spy. Her beauty became famous all through the guerrilla country. Mounted on a fiery charger, erect as an arrow, and with her long hair flying from beneath a broad sombrero, she made a picture which was indeed striking.

After the war she became acquainted with Jesse and Frank James and Cole Younger. At the age of twenty she married one James Reed, son of a wealthy Missouri farmer, but who "went to the bad" and met the dashing Belle while he was a companion of the James Gang.

Jim Reed and his bride lived in Los Angeles, California, from 1869 to 1871, where a son was born to them. Prior to this, she had borne a daughter who was named Pearl.

Jim Reed soon was a fugitive from justice and spent much time in the Indian Territory at the home of Tom Starr, a Cherokee Indian. Tom Starr had an unsavory reputation. Jim Reed was murdered in 1875 by one John Morris in Texas.

After Reed's death Belle removed to Dallas, Texas, where she maintained a stable of high-bred horses. Her first offense was the setting afire of a country store in a spirit of recklessness. She was arrested, but a wealthy stockman paid her fine and she was released.

BELLE gradually gathered about her a bunch of male admirers, to each of whom she is said to have acted as lover, and to have been especially gracious to one styled "Blue Duck." One time Blue Duck borrowed two thousand dollars from Belle and went on a tear at Dodge City, Kansas. He lost the money gambling and returned to Belle, whereupon

she swore a string of oaths at him, mounted her horse and sped for Dodge City.

Entering the saloon, she strode to the gambling-table where seven thousand dollars was lying. She grabbed it all, backed away, with her gun covering the crowd, and suavely told them that if they wanted their money to "come on down into the Territory and get it." Belle never had any "callers" for the coin.

In 1880 Belle married Sam Starr, a son of Tom Starr. She then took up a claim in the Cherokee Nation, intending, as she stated, to live in seclusion and keep within the law.

Her ranch was at a remote spot known as Younger's Bend, where gradually the tough characters with whom she had previously associated came to look upon her home as a rendezvous. A cave in the hills close by was fitted up, and here many an outlaw who was "wanted" lay in security, befriended by Belle Starr.

Occasionally Belle would steal away with well-filled trunks and visit the Eastern watering-places of renown, where she flashed a large roll and spent it with a lavish hand.

Her devotion to her daughter Pearl was remarkable. She idolized the girl, yet disappointed her in a love-suit. In 1897 Pearl married in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

In 1882 Belle and Sam Starr were arrested for horse-stealing and served nine months in the Detroit House of Correction. Here Belle gained much favor with the warden, matron and assistants by her vivacious and pleasant demeanor. They could scarcely realize that this refined and seemingly tender woman was the terrible Belle Starr, Queen of Desperadoes.

BELLE STARR was murdered by an unknown man on her forty-third birthday, as stated above. She had accompanied Jim Starr, a cousin of her husband, on horseback. He was en route to Fort Smith to answer to a charge of horse-stealing.

After riding a day's journey with Jim Starr, she turned back toward home, and while riding along a stretch of quiet road was waylaid by an assassin armed with a shotgun, who fired two charges of heavy shot at close range.

Belle's horse dashed home, where her daughter Pearl noticed the animal. Pearl and a neighbor reached the wounded woman just as she breathed her last.

Belle Starr's own son, Ed, was under suspicion for some time, but was not arrested. One Edgar Watson, with whom Belle had had frequent clashes, was also suspected and arrested, but only circumstantial evidence could be found against him and he was later released.

NEW BEDFORD

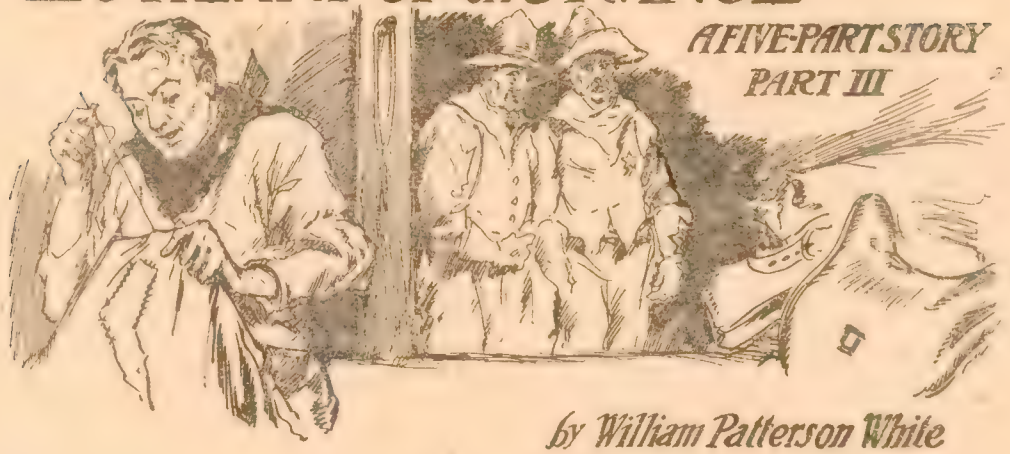
by Richard Butler Glaenzer

THEIR hair slicked up to match their Sabbath pose,
Gilt-matted portraits primly hung in rows,
Portraits of famous old New Bedford whalers
Taken back in the days of Jenny Lind;
Demure daguerreotypes of bull-necked sailors,
Whose bellows split the wind
With "Thar she blows!"

All but forgotten here where they were born,
Their deeds still ring through chanteys from the Horn
To Bering on all ships that reek with blubber;
They were the masters of the gales and tides,
The terror of the loafer and the lubber,
Kings, though uncrowned, both sides
Of Capricorn.

The HEART of the RANGE

A FIVE-PART STORY
PART III



by William Patterson White

Author of "Hidden Trails," "A Pair of Queens," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

RACEY DAWSON, after a drunken spree in the Happy Heart Saloon, awoke with an aching head on a side-hill. He made a startling discovery that the horse upon which he had departed from the Happy Heart was not his horse, and straightway he rode to the blacksmith-shop to solve the mystery.

There Racey was still kept in the dark, for the smith and even "Kansas" Casey, the deputy sheriff, took the "horse rustling" as a joke. But none would tell Racey who had his horse or whose horse he now rode.

Certain feminine articles in the saddle-pocket led Racey to inquire of Miss Blythe, keeper of the Blue Pigeon Store, and she identified the horse as that of Miss Dale, an old maid who lived with her parents, new residents of the cow-country, on the Dale ranch.

Before he went there to swap horses, Racey, in a Chinese restaurant, quarreled with a burly youth over a yellow dog that the youth apparently was trying to steal from the girl lookout of the Happy Heart. They went outdoors and gun-play ensued, and Racey, quicker on the draw, shot the youth in the shoulder. Then Racey went into the Happy Heart.

When he came out, two men were examining the spot where the shooting had taken place—Lanpher, owner of the 88 ranch, and a good-looking stranger. From their conversation Racey knew that a plot was afoot to dispossess a certain old "Chin-whisker." He also learned that several other cowmen were in the plot, including Luke Tweezy, a notorious lawyer.

While Racey was riding away, the girl of the Happy Heart, whose dog he had protected, rode up and informed him that the burly youth whom he had "plugged" was "Nebraska" Jones, leader of the Curry comb crowd of gunfighters. Nebraska would surely requite that shot, she said.

When he rode to the Dale ranch to return the pony, he found that the "old maid," Dale's daughter Dolly, was a pretty young girl. But before he exchanged the pony for his own mount he warned her of the plot afoot to dispossess her father. While he was talking with her, Dale came in drunk. Racey, inspired by the pretty Miss Dale, was determined to play a high hand in the game between Dale and the plotters.

JACK HARPE was one of the plotters. He had already engaged Racey and his pal, "Swing" Tunstall, to ride on the 88 ranch. But suddenly he informed Racey and Swing that he had changed his mind and given the job to two old friends.

At the Starlight Saloon Racey and Swing with Luke Tweezy drank together, with the result that Racey and Swing lay in a pile of hay in Tom Kane's stable to sober up. Looking across at the back porch of the Blue Pigeon Store, they saw Luke Tweezy talking to Miss Blythe and Molly Dale.

Later somebody came into the stable. He stumbled over Racey and drew a knife. Racey knocked him unconscious with his revolver-barrel and the newcomer proved to be Luke Tweezy. Racey found a letter to Luke from Jacob Pooley in Luke's hat, which unmistakably revealed the plot against Dale.

Marie, the lookout of the Happy Heart, later led Racey away from Main Street of Farewell, where "Bull," the bartender of the Starlight Saloon, to requite an old score, was lying in wait to "bush-whack" him.

Racey hid outside Marie's cabin while she talked with Bull and revealed that Jack Harpe's real name was Bill Smith, whom Bull and she knew in past years. When Bull left, Racey took him prisoner and asked him why Bill Smith changed his name. Bull refused to tell, but when Racey threatened to run him out of town if he refused, the bartender promised to tell the story of Bill Smith—alias Harpe—before sundown the following night.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SURPRIZE

THE sun, lifting over the rim of the world, sprayed its rays through the window and splashed with gold the face of Racey Dawson. He awoke, and much to the profane disgust of Swing Tunstall, shook that worthy awake immediately.

"Aw, lemme sleep, will yuh?" begged Swing with suspicious meekness, reaching surreptitiously for a boot. "You lemme alone, that's a good feller."

"Get up," commanded Racey. "Get up. It's the early worm catches the most fish. Rise an' shine, Swing. Never let the sun catch you snorin'. Besides, I can't sleep no more myself. I——"

Wham! Swing's flung boot shaved Racey's surprized ear and smashed against the partition.

"You'll wake up that Starlight proprietor," Racey said calmly, as he picked up the boot and dropped it out of the window. "Good dog," he continued, presumably addressing a canine friend without, "leave Swing's nice new boot alone, will yuh? Don't go gnawin' at it thataway. It ain't no bone."

Swing, pulling on his pants, left the room, hopping physically and mentally. Racey rested both elbows on the sill and waited happily for his comrade to appear beneath him.

"Shucks," he said in a tone of great surprize when Swing shot round the corner of the hotel, "I shore thought there was a dog there a-teasin' that boot. I could have took my Bible oath there was a great big, black, curly-haired feller with lots o' teeth down there. I seen him, Swing. Shore thought I did. Must 'a' been mistaken. An' you went an' believed me, an' got splinters in yore feet 'cause you was in such a hurry. Ne'mine, here's the other one."

He jerked the boot in question at Swing's head and sat down on his cot to complete his own dressing.

Came then the sound of a prodigious yawn from the room next door occupied by Jack Harpe. A cot creaked. A boot was scraped along the floor.

"Shore must be a sound sleeper," said Racey Dawson to himself, "if he really did just wake up."

He buckled on his gun-belt, set his hat a-tilt on one ear and went down to wash his face and hands in the common basin on the wash-bench outside the kitchen door.

Swing Tunstall was before him, and was disposed to make an issue of the dropped boots. Only by his superior agility was Racey enabled to dodge all save a few drops of a full bucket of water.

"Djever get left? Djever get left?" singsonged Racey from the corner of the building and set the thumb of one hand to his nose and twiddled opprobrious fingers at his comrade. "You wanna be a li'l bit quicker when you go to souse me, Swing. Yo're too slow, a lot too slow. Yep. Now I wouldn't go for to fling that pail at me, Swing. You might bust it, an' yore carelessness thataway has already cost yuh ten dollars an' six bits."

This was too much for the ruffled Swing. Waving the pail, he pursued his tormentor round the hotel and into the front doorway. Racey fled up the stairs. At the stair foot Swing gave over the chase and returned to the wash-bench to resume his face-washing. Racey went on into their room. There were in it several articles belonging to Swing that he intended to throw out of the window at once.

But when he had entered the room and the door was closed behind him he did not touch any of Swing's belongings. Instead he remained standing in the middle of the room, looking thoughtfully at the floor. What had given him pause was the fact that he had found the door ajar. And he knew with absolute certainty that he had closed the door tightly before he went downstairs.

It is the vagrant straw that shows the wind's direction, and since the attempt to bushwhack him Racey was not overlooking any straws. The door had been ajar. Why?

There was no closet and from where he stood he could see under both cots. No one lay concealed in the room. The bedclothes on Swing's cot had not been touched. At least they were in precisely the position in which they had been landed when thrown back by Swing's careless hand. Racey did not believe that his own had been touched either. But the saddle-bags and *cantenas* lying on the floor at the head of his cot had certainly been moved. He recalled distinctly having, the previous evening, piled his *cantenas* on top of the saddle-bags.

And now the saddle-bags were on top of the *cantenas*.

He glanced at Swing's war-bags. They had not been moved. He wondered if Jack Harpe and the Starlight's owner were still in their rooms. He listened intently. Hearing no sound, he went out into the hall and knocked gently on Jack Harpe's door and called him softly by name. Getting no reply, he lifted the latch and walked in. There were Jack Harpe's saddle-bags, *cantenas* and rifle in a corner. A coat lay on the tumbled blankets of the cot. Otherwise the room was empty.

Racey went out, being careful to close the door tightly, and went to the room of the Starlight's owner. This room too was empty. Racey returned to his own room, tossed his *cantenas* and saddle-bags on the cot and began feverishly to paw through their contents.

Nothing had been subtracted from or added to the heterogeneous collection of articles in the *cantenas*. The contents of the off-side saddle-bags were in their familiar disorder. There was nothing in or about the off-side saddle-bags to arouse suspicion. Not a thing.

He unbuckled the flap of the near-side saddle-bag and flipped it back. Somebody had been at this saddle-bag. He was sure of it. His extra shirt, instead of being wadded into the fore-end of the saddle-bag on top of a pair of socks, had been stuffed into the hind-end on top of a pair of underdrawers. Which underdrawers should by rights have been at the bottom of the leather hold-all.

But there was something else at the bottom of the saddle-bag. It was something long and hard and wrapped in the buttonless undershirt despised and rejected by Swing.

Racey unrolled the undershirt. His eyes stared in genuine horror at what the unrolling revealed. It was the commonest of butcher-knives that some one's busy hand had wrapped in the undershirt. But what was not nearly so common was that the broad thin blade was stained with blood. From point to haft the steel was as red as if it had been dipped in a pail of paint. Indeed, being dry, it looked not unlike paint. But Racey knew that it was not paint.

"It was dry before it was wrapped in that undershirt," he said to himself, testing the blood on the blade with a speculative finger-nail. "There ain't a mar on the under-shirt. Here it is again—the earmark of a crime, an' no crime—yet. This is gettin' monotonous."

He laid down the knife, settled his hat and methodically searched Swing Tunstall's war-bags. It turned out a needless precaution. He had felt that it would be. But he could not afford to take any risks. Having found nothing in Swing's war-bags save his friend's personal belongings, Racey slid the knife up his sleeve and went down-stairs to breakfast. On the way he stopped a moment at a fortuitous knot-hole in the board wall. When he passed on the knife was no longer with him.

Jack Harpe was still eating when Racey eased himself into the chair at Swing's right hand. Jack Harpe nodded to Racey and went serenely on with his meal. Racey seized knife and fork, squared his elbows and began to saw at his steak. And as he chewed and swallowed and sloshed the coffee round in his cup in order to get the full benefit of the sugar he wondered whether it was Jack Harpe or Bull to whom he was indebted for the butcher-knife. It was one of the two, he thought. Who else could it be?

He believed it would be wise to spend most of his spare time in his room. At least until he knew the inwardness of the butcher-knife incident. It was possible that the man who had secreted the knife would return. Racey might well be in line for other even more delicate attentions.

BEFORE going up to his room, Racey went to the corral. He had left his saddle-blanket out all night, he mentioned to Swing in the hearing of Jack Harpe. He was gone five minutes. When he returned, strangely enough minus the saddle-blanket, he was in time to see Piney Jackson dart round the corner of the blacksmith shop, cup his hand at his mouth and raise a stentorian bellow for Jake Rule.

Piney did not wait to see whether the sheriff replied to his call. Instead he beckoned violently to the handful of men grouped on the sidewalk in front of the hotel.

"C'mon over!" he bawled. "Look what I found there this mornin'."

Jack Harpe, and the owner of the Starlight being among those present and responding to the invitation, Racey Dawson took a chance and went with the rest.

"Look at that," said Piney Jackson, indicating a humped-up individual sitting behind the wood-pile.

Racey and the other spectators went round the wood-pile and viewed the humped-up individual. The latter was Bull, the Starlight bartender. And he was dead, very dead. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. He was a ghastly object.

"Who done it?" inquired one of the fools who infest every group of men.

"He didn't leave no card," the blacksmith replied with sarcasm.

The fool asked no more questions. Came then Jake Rule and Kansas Casey. Jake, a rather heavy, well-meaning officer, old at the business, began to sniff about for clues. Kansas Casey laid the body down on its back and thoroughly searched the pockets of the clothing.

"One thing," said Kansas Casey, looking up from what he had found—a handful of silver dollars, a pocket-knife and a silver watch—"robbery wasn't the motive."

Racey looked sidewise from under his eyebrows at Jack Harpe. The latter was staring down unmoved at the dead body.

"Somebody must 'a' had a grudge against Bull," offered the fool.

"You think so?" said Piney. "Yo're a real bright feller."

The fool subsided a second time.

"Lookit here, Jake," Piney continued to the sheriff's address, "you don't have to kick my wood all over the county, do you?"

"I'm looking for the knife," explained the sheriff, ceasing not to stub his toes against the solid chunks. "Feller after doin' a thing like this gets flustrated sometimes an' drops the knife. An' findin' the knife might be a help in locatin' the feller."

All of which seemed sufficiently logical to the bystanders.

Racey decided he had seen enough. Besides he wanted to camp closer to his warbags. He should have been in his room before this, and he would have been had he cared to make himself conspicuous by not going along with the crowd to see what Piney Jackson had found.

Declining Swing's earnest invitation to drink, he returned to the hotel. Swing went grouchily to the Happy Heart, wondering what was the matter with his friend. It was not like the Racey he knew to play the hermit.

Once in his room, Racey again explored his own and Swing's saddle-bags and *cantenas*, looked under the cots and through the bedclothes. But he found nothing that did not belong to either himself or Swing.

"They didn't make a second trip," he said to himself. "I'm bettin' it's Jack Harpe. Shore it is, the polecat."

Then in order to have a water-tight reason for remaining in the room he pulled off his boots and trousers, fished a housewife from a *cantena* and set about repairing a rip in his trousers. It was a perfectly good rip. He had had it a long time. What more natural than that on this particular day he should wish to sew it up?

It was an hour later that he heard the stamp of several pairs of boots on the stairs. He could hear the wheezing, labored breathing of Bill Lainey, the hotel proprietor. Climbing the stairs always bothered Bill. The latter and his followers came along the hall and stopped in front of Racey's door.

"This is his room," panted Bill Lainey.

Unceremoniously the latch was lifted. A man entered. The man was Jake Rule, the sheriff of Fort Creek County. He was followed by Kansas Casey, his deputy.

Jake looked serious, but Kansas was smiling as he closed the door behind him. Then he opened it quickly and thrust his head into the hall.

"No need of you, Bill," he said.

"Aw right," said Bill aggrievedly, and forthwith shuffled away.

Kansas withdrew his head and nodded to Jake Rule.

"He's gone," he said.

Racey Dawson, sitting crosslegged on his cot and plying his needle in most workmanlike fashion, grinned comfortably at the two officers. Lord, how glad he was he had found that knife! If he hadn't——

"Si'down, gents," invited Racey. "There's two chairs, or yuh can have Swing's cot if yuh like."

Jake Rule shook his head.

"We don't wanna sit down, Racey," he said. "We got a li'l business with you maybe."

"Maybe? Then you ain't none shore about it?"

"Not unless yo're willin'. Yuh see, Dolan's drunk today, an' of course we can't get a warrant till he's sober."

"A warrant? For me?"

"Not yet," said Jake Rule. "Only a search-warrant—first. But of course if you ain't willin' we can't touch 'em."

"Still, Racey," put in Kansas Casey smoothly, "if you could see yore way to lettin' us go through yore war-bags, yore's an' Swing's, it would be a great help, an' we'd remember it—after."

"Yeah, we shore would," declared the sheriff. "You save us trouble now, Racey, an' I'll guarantee to make you almighty comfortable in the calaboose. You won't have nothin' to complain of. Not a thing."

Racey laughed cheerily.

"Got me in jail already, have yuh?" he chuckled. "You'll have me hung next."

"Oh, they's quite some formalities to go through before that happens," declared the sheriff seriously.

"I'm glad," drawled Racey. "I thought maybe you was gonna take me right out an' string me up before dinner. Wanna search our stuff, huh? Hop to it. Swing ain't here, but I'll give yuh permission for him. He won't mind."

Jake and Kansas went at the war-bags like terriers digging out a badger. Racey leaned on his elbow and watched them. What luck that the door had been ajar and that he had noticed it! If it had not been a life-and-death matter he would have laughed aloud.

AT THE end of twenty minutes the officers stood up. They had gone through everything in the room, including the coats. Kansas Casey wore a pleased smile. Jake Rule looked disappointed.

"Don't look so glum, Jake," urged Racey. "Is it a fair question to ask what yo're huntin' for?"

"The knife," he said shortly. "The knife that cut Bull's throat."

"The knife, huh?" remarked Racey as if to himself. "So yo're suspectin' me of wipin' out Bull, are yuh?"

"I never did," said Kansas promptly. "I know you. You ain't that kind."

Jake looked reproachfully at his deputy.

"You never can tell, Racey," he said, turning to the puncher. "I've got so myself I don't trust nobody no more."

"Was this here yore own idea," pursued Racey, "or did somebody sic you onto me?"

Jake made no immediate answer. It was obvious that he was of two minds whether to speak or not.

"Why not tell him?" suggested Kansas. "What's the odds?"

At this Jake took a piece of paper from his vest pocket and handed it to Racey.

"I found this lyin' on the floor o' my office when I come back after attendin' to Bull," was his explanation.

There were words printed on the slip of paper. They read:

> Look in Racey Dawson's room for what killed Bull.

The communication was unsigned.

Racey handed it back to Jake Rule.

"Got any idea who put it in yore office?" he asked.

Jake shook his head.

"I dunno," he said. "The window was open. Anybody could 'a' throwed it in."

"You satisfied now, Jake, or—" Racey did not complete the sentence.

"Oh, I'm satisfied you didn't do it," replied the sheriff, "if that's what you mean. But —— the man who wrote this here joke!"

As he spoke he tore the note in two, dropped the pieces on the floor and stamped out of the room. Kansas Casey looked over his shoulder as he followed in the wake of his superior. He saw Racey Dawson picking up the two pieces of the note. Racey's mouth was a grim, uncompromising line.

"If Racey ever finds out who wrote that," thought Kansas to himself, pulling the door shut, "—— will pop. An' I hope it does."

For he liked Racey Dawson, did Kansas Casey, the deputy sheriff.

CHAPTER XV

FIRE! FIRE!

"WHY didn't you tell me at breakfast?" demanded Swing Tunstall.

"An' give it away to Jack Harpe!" said scornful Racey. "Shore, that would 'a' been a bright thing to do now, wouldn't it?"

"What didja do with the knife?"

"Dropped it through a knot-hole in the wall. The only way they'll ever get hold of it is by tearin' the buildin' down."

"Jack Harpe, if he is the feller, will know you found it an' try again."

"Shore. We can't help that. One thing, we'll know before the day is over whether it is Jack Harpe or not."

"How?"

"Remember me this mornin' tellin' you

how I'd left my saddle-blanket out all night an' then goin' out in the corral for the same? I said it so's Jack could hear me. He did hear me an' he watched me go. He seen me go out round the corral, an' he seen me come back without the saddle-blanket. Now anybody would know I wouldn't leave my saddle-blanket out behind the corral, would I?"

"Not likely"

"But a feller who'd just found a knife with blood on it in his war-bags might go out back of the corral to lose the knife, mightn't he?"

"He might."

"Well, that's what I done. Naturally, havin' already lost the knife down through the knot-hole, I couldn't lose her again. But I done the best I could. I dug in the ground with a sharp stick, an' I made a li'l hole like, an' I filled her in again an' tromped her all down flat, an' sort of half-smoothed down the roughed-up ground like I was tryin' to hide my tracks an' what I'd been doin'. Then I come away

"Now I'm bettin' that if Jack Harpe is the lad who tucked away that knife in my war-bags he'll go skirmishin' out behind the corral to see what I was really doin'."

"Maybe." Doubtfully.

"There ain't no maybe if he's the man done it. An' from where we're a-layin' under this wagon we can see the back of the corral plain as—There he comes now."

The posts of the corral were less than a hundred yards from where Racey and Swing lay beneath a pole-propped freight wagon. From the wagon, which was standing beyond the stage company's corral, the ground sloped gently to the hotel corral. Racey had taken the precaution to mask their position with a cedar-bush.

Hatless, he peered through the branches at the man quartering the ground behind the hotel corral.

"He's gettin' close to where I made that hole," he told Swing. "Now he's found it," he resumed as the man dropped on his knees. "Jack Harpe all along. Ain't he the humorsome codger?"

"He shore couldn't 'a' dug up that hole," declared Swing when Jack Harpe jumped to his feet after a sojourn on his knees of possibly thirty seconds' duration.

"No," assented Racey, puzzled. "He couldn't. There's an odd number," he added, as Jack Harpe pelted back at a brisk trot over the way he had come. "Le's not go just yet, Swing. I got a feelin'."

He was glad of this feeling when ten minutes later Jack Harpe returned with Jake Rule and Kansas Casey. The latter carried a shovel. The three men clustered round the spot where Racey had dug his hole. Kansas Casey set his foot on the shovel and drove it into the ground. Racey chuckled at the pleasant sight. What must inevitably follow would be even pleasanter.

The deputy sheriff made the dirt fly for six minutes. Then he threw down the shovel, pushed back his hat and wiped is face on his sleeve He spoke, but his language was unintelligible. Jack Harpe said something and picked up the shovel. He began to dig. He cast the earth about for possibly five minutes.

"Ain't he the prairie-dog, huh?" Racey demanded, jabbing his comrade in the ribs with stiffened thumb. "Just watch him scratch gravel."

Suddenly Jake Rule and Kansas Casey turned their backs on the frantically laboring Jack Harpe and walked away. Jack Harpe watched them, threw up a few more half-hearted shovelfuls and then slammed the implement to earth with a clatter, hitched up his pants and strode hurriedly after the officers.

"That proves it, I guess," said Swing.

"Naturally She's enough for us anyhow. —— it to ——!"

"Whatsamatter?" inquired Swing, surprized at his friend's vehemence.

"Whatsamatter? Whatsamatter? Everythin's the matter. I just happened to think that now Bull won't be able to tell me what he was goin' to tonight."

"That's so. Can't yuh ask the girl?"

"I can, but I ain't shore it'll do any good. Marie ain't the kind that blats all she knows just to hear herself talk. If she wants to tell me she will. If she don't want to, she won't. Bull was my one best bet."

"What's that?" cried Swing, raising himself on an elbow.

"That" was the noise of a tumult in Farewell Main Street. There were shouts and yells and screams. Above all, screams. Racey and Swing hurried to the street. When they reached it the shouts and yells had subsided, but the screams had not. If anything they were louder than before. They issued from the mouth of Marie, whom Jake Rule, Kansas Casey and four other

men were taking to the calaboose. They were doing their duty as gently as possible, and Marie was making it as difficult for them as possible. She was as mad as a teased rattlesnake, and not a man of her six captors but bore the marks of finger-nails, teeth or heels.

She had, they were told by a bystander, after Marie had been safely lodged in the calaboose, attacked without warning and with a derringer Jack Harpe as he was walking peacefully along the sidewalk in front of the Starlight. Only by good luck and a loose board that had turned under the girl's foot as she fired had Mr. Harpe been preserved from sudden death.

"That's shore tough," Racey said to their informant. "I'm goin' right away now an' get me a hammer an' some nails an' fix that loose board."

"You better not let Jack Harpe hear you say that," cautioned the other.

"If you want somethin' to do, s'pose now you tell him," was Racey's instant suggestion.

Racey's tone was light but his stare was hard. The other man went away.

"FIRE! Fire!" shrilled young Sam Brown Calloway, bouncing out of his father's store and jumping up and down in the middle of Main Street.

"The jail's afire! The jail's afire!"

Men added their shouts to his childish squalls and ran toward the jail. Racey and Swing trundled along the sidewalk together.

"She's afire all right," said Racey. "Lookit the smoke siftin' through the window at the corner."

The smoke was followed by a vicious lash of flame that whipped up the side of the building and set the eaves alight. The glass of another window fell through the bars with a tinkle. A billow of smoke rushed forth. Smoke was seeping through cracks at the back of the building.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed Racey, as a shriek rent the air. "The girl's in there!"

He had for the moment forgotten that Marie was incarcerated in the jail. But Kansas Casey had not forgotten. Racey, having picked up a handy ax, raced round to hack only to find the deputy unlocking the back door. A burst of smoke as he flung open the door assailed their lungs. Choking, holding their breath, both men dashed into the jail. Kansas unlocked the girl's cell.

"You shore took yore time about comin'," drawled Marie. "I didn't know but what I'd be burned up with the rest of the jail. You big lummox! You don't have to bust my wrist, do yuh? Go easy, or I'll claw yore face off."

Once outside they were immediately surrounded by the townsfolk. Most of them were laughing. But Jake Rule was not laughing.

"Good joke on you, Jake," grinned a friend. "Burned herself out on yuh, didn't she?"

"Yuh can't keep a good man down," shouted another.

"Never let the baby play with matches," advised a third.

"Get pails, gents!" shouted Rule. "We gotta put it out. Where's a pail. Who——"

"Aw, letter-burn," said Calloway. "How in —— yuh gonna put it out? She's all blazin' inside. You couldn't put it out with Shoshone Falls."

"The wind's blowin' away from town," contributed Mike Flynn. "Nothin' else'll catch. Besides we been needin' a new calaboose for a long time. You done us a better turn than you think, Marie."

"If you say I set the jail afire, Mike Flynn," cried Marie, "yo're a liar by the clock."

"You set it afire," said the sheriff sternly. "You'll find it a serious business settin' a jail afire."

"Prove I done it then!" squalled Marie. "Prove it, you slab-sided hunk! Yah, you can't prove it, an' you know it!"

To this the sheriff made no reply.

"We gotta put her somewhere till the judge gets sober," he said hurriedly. "Guess we'll put her in yore back room, Mike."

"Guess you won't," countered Mike. "They ain't no insurance on my place, an' I ain't takin' no chances, not a chance."

"They's the hotel," suggested Kansas Casey.

"You don't use my hotel for no calaboose," squawked Bill Lainey. "Nawsir. Not much. You put her in yore own house, Jake. Then if she sets you afire, it's yore own fault. Yeah."

Jake Rule scratched his head. It was patent that he did not quite know what to do. Came then Dolan, the local justice.

Dolan's hair was plastered well down over his ears and forehead. Dolan was pale yellow of countenance and breathed strongly through his nose. He looked not a little sick. He pawed a way through the crowd and cast a bilious glance at Marie.

He inquired of Jake Rule as to the trouble and its cause. On being told, he convened court on the spot. Judge Dolan agreed with Mike Flynn that the burning of the jail was a trivial matter requiring no official attention. For was not Dolan's brother-in-law a carpenter, who undoubtedly would be given the contract for a new jail? Quite so.

"You can't prove nothin' about this jail-burnin'," he told Jake Rule and the assembled multitude, "but this assault on Jack Harpe is a cat with another tail. It was a lawless act an' hadn't oughta have happened. Marie, yo're a citizen of Farewell, an' you'd oughta take an interest in the community instead of surgin' out an' tryin' to massacree a visitor in our midst, a visitor who's figurin' on settlin' hereabouts, I understand. —— knows we need all the inhabitants we can get, an' it's just such tricks as yores, Marie, that discourages immigration."

Here Judge Dolan frowned upon Marie and thumped the palm of his hand with a bony fist. Marie stood first on one leg and then on the other and hung her head. Since her raving outburst at the time of her arrest she had cooled considerably. It was evident that she was now trying to make the best of a bad business.

"Marie," resumed Judge Dolan, and cleared his throat importantly, "why did you shoot at Mr. Jack Harpe?"

"He insulted me," Marie replied without a quiver.

"I ain't ever said a word to her," countered Jack Harpe. "I don't even know the girl."

The judge turned back to Marie.

"Have you any witnesses to this insult?" he queried.

"Nary a witness." Marie shook her brown head.

"Y' oughta have a witness. It's yore word against his. Where did this insult take place?"

"At my shack. He come there early this mornin'."

"That's a lie!" boomed Jack Harpe.

"Which will be about all from you!" snapped Judge Dolan, vigorously pounding his palm.

"What did he say to you?" was the judge's next question.

"I'd rather not say," hedged Marie.

"Well, of course, you don't have to answer," said the judge gallantly. "But alla same, Marie, you hadn't oughta used a gun on him. It—it ain't ladylike. Nawsir. Don't you do it again or I'll send you to Piegan City. Ten dollars or ten days."

"What?" Thus Jack Harpe, astonished beyond measure.

"Ten dollars or ten days," repeated Judge Dolan. "Takin' a shot at you is worth ten dollars but no more. It don't make no difference whether yuh come here to invest money or not, you wanna go slow round the women."

"But I didn't even say howdy to her," protested Jack Harpe

"She says different. You leave her alone."

Public opinion, which at first had rather favored Jack Harpe, now frowned upon him. He shouldn't have insulted the girl. No, sir, he had no business doing that. Be a good thing if he was arrested for it perhaps. What a virtuous thing is public opinion.

"I ain't got a nickel, judge," said Marie. "You'll have to trust me for it till the end of the week."

"I'll pay her fine," nipped in Racey, glad of an opportunity to annoy Jack Harpe. "Here y' are, judge. Ten dollars you said."

IT WAS a few minutes after he had eaten dinner that Racey Dawson presented himself at the door of Kansas Casey's shack. The door was open. Racey stood in the doorway and leaned the shovel against the wall of the room.

"You forgot yore shovel, Kansas," he said gently, "or Jack Harpe did. Same thing, an' here it is."

Kansas had the grace to look a trifle shamefaced.

"Somebody said you'd done buried that knife—" he began, and stopped.

"Yep, I' know—Jack Harpe," smiled Racey. "Li'l Brighteyes is shore a friend of mine. Only I wouldn't bank too strong on what he says about me."

"I ain't," denied the deputy.

"Another thing, Kansas," drawled Racey, "did yuh ever stop to think how come he

knowed so much about that knife? An' did you ask him if he was the gent left that paper in Jake's office? An' goin' on from that, did you ask him why he didn't come out flatfooted at first an' say what he thought he knowed instead o' waitin' till after you'd searched my room? You don't have to answer, Kansas, only if I was you I'd think it over; I'd think it over plenty. So long."

From the house of Casey he went to the shack of Marie. He found the girl cooking her dinner quite as if attempts at murder, dead men and jail-burning were matters of small moment. But if her manner was placid, her eyes were not. They were bright and hard, and they flickered stormily upon him when she lifted her gaze from the pan of frying potatoes and saw who it was standing in the doorway.

"I'm obliged to yuh," she said calmly, "for payin' my fine. You run away so quick this mornin' you didn't gimme no chance to thank yuh. I'll pay yuh back soon's I get paid come Saturday."

Racey stared reproachfully. He shifted his weight from one uncomfortable foot to the other.

"I didn't come here about the fine," he told her. "I—" He stopped, uncertain whether to continue or not.

"If you didn't come about the fine it must be somethin' else important," said she insultingly. "I shore oughta be set up, I s'pose. So far it's always been me that's had to make all the moves."

"Moves," repeated Racey, frankly puzzled.

"Moves," she mimicked. "Didn't you never play checkers? Oh, ne' mine, ne' mine. Don't take it to heart. I don't mean nothin'. Never did. C'mon in an' set. Take a chair. That one— What do you want? Down, feller, down!"

The command was called forth by the violent entry of the yellow dog which, remembering Racey as a friend, flung itself upon him with whines and tail-waggings.

"He's all right," said Racey, rubbing the rough head. "I just thought I'd ask yuh what yuh knowed about Jack Harpe."

Marie's narrowed eyes turned dark with suspicion.

"Whadda you know about me an' Jack Harpe?" she demanded.

"Not as much as I'd like to know," was his frank reply.

"I ain't talkin'." Shortly.

"Now lookit here—" he began wheedlingly.

She shook her head at him:

"'Sno use. I don't tell everythin' I know."

"Then you do know somethin' about Jack Harpe."

"I didn't say I did."

"You didn't. But——"

"That's what the goat done to the stone wall. Look out you don't bust yore horns too."

"Meanin'?"

"Meanin' you'll knock 'em off short before you get anythin' out o' me I don't wanna tell you. An' I tell yuh flat I ain't talkin' over Jack Harpe with you."

"Scared to?" he hazarded boldly.

"You can give it any name yuh like. Pull up a chair. Dinner's most ready. They's enough for two."

Despite the fact that he had just dined at the hotel he accepted her invitation in the hope that she could be persuaded to talk, and after dinner he smoked several cigarets with her—still hoping. Finally, finding that nothing he could say was of any avail to move her, he took up his hat and departed.

"Don't go away mad," she called after him.

"I ain't," he denied, and went on, her mocking laughter ringing in his ears.

After Racey was gone out of sight Marie turned back into her little house. There was no laughter on her lips or in her eyes as she sat down in a chair beside the table and stared across it at the chair in which Racey had been sitting.

"He's a nice boy," she whispered under her breath, after a time. "I wish—I wish——"

But what it was she wished it is impossible to relate for, instead of completing the sentence, she hid her face in her hands and began to cry.

Early next morning Racey Dawson and Swing Tunstall rode out of town by the Marysville trail. They were bound for the Bar S and a job.

"WHAT have you been drinkin', Racey?" demanded Mr. Saltoun, winking at his son-in-law and foreman, Tom Loudon.

The latter did not return the wink. He kept a sober gaze fastened on Racey Dawson.

Racey was staring at Mr. Saltoun. His eyes began to narrow.

"Meanin'?" he drawled.

"Now don't go crawlin' round huntin' offense where none's meant," advised Mr. Saltoun. "But you know how it is yoreself, Racey. Any gent who gets so full he can't pick out his own hoss an' goes weavin' off on somebody else's is liable to make mistakes other ways. You gotta admit it's possible."

The slight tinge of red underlying Racey's heavy coat of tan acknowledged the corn.

"It's possible," he admitted.

Mr. Saltoun saw his advantage and seized it.

"S'pose now this is another mistake?"

"Tell yuh what I'll do," said Racey. "You done said you had jobs for a couple of handsome young fellers like us. Aw right. We go to work. We ride for yuh six months for nothin'."

"Huh?" Mr. Saltoun and Tom Loudon stared their astonishment.

"Oh, the cat's got more of a tail than that," said Racey. "You don't pay us nothin' for them six months, provided what I said will happen don't happen. If it does happen like I say, you pay each of us two hundred large round simoleons per each an' every month."

"Come again," said Mr. Saltoun, wrinkling his forehead.

Racey came again as requested.

"Six months is a long time," frowned Mr. Saltoun. "If I lose——"

"But I dunno what I'm talkin' about," pointed out Racey. "I make mistakes; yuh know that. An' you was so shore nothin' was gonna happen. Are you still shore?"

"Well—" hesitated Mr. Saltoun.

"If you take us up you stand to be in the wages of two punchers for six months. That's four hundred an' eighty dollars. Almost five hundred dollars. Of course, it's a chance. What ain't, I'd like to know? But yo're so shore she's gonna keep on, come day go day, like always, that I'd oughta have odds."

"Five to one," mused Mr. Saltoun, pulling at the ends of his gray mustache.

"An' fair enough—seein' that nothin' is gonna happen."

"I wouldn't do it," put in Tom Loudon. "Them trick bets are unlucky."

"Oh, I dunno," said Mr. Saltoun, running true to form in that he rarely took kindly to advice. "Looks like a good chance to get six months' work out o' two men for nothin'."

"Looks like a good chance to lose twenty-four hundred dollars," exclaimed Tom Loudon wrathfully.

"My ——, Tom," said Mr. Saltoun, cocking a grizzled eyebrow, "you don't mean to tell me you think they's any chance a-tall of Racey's winnin' this bet, do yuh?"

"They's just about ten times more chance for him to win than to lose."

"Tom, do yuh ever see any li'l pink lizards with blue tails an' red feet? I hear that's a sign, too."

"Aw right, have it yore own way," said Tom Loudon with every symptom of disgust. "Only don't say I didn't warn yuh."

"——, Tom, y' old wet blanket, yo're always a-warnin' me. I never see such a feller."

"Aw right, I said. Aw right. But when yo're a-writin' out a check for twenty-four hundred dollars, just remember how I always told yuh somebody was gonna horn in here some day an' glom half the range."

"Laugh," said Mr. Saltoun. "Yo're shore the jokin'est feller, Tom Loudon. Even Racey an' his partner are laughin'."

"I should think they would," Tom Loudon returned savagely. "I'd laugh too if I stood to win twenty-four hundred in six months."

Mr. Saltoun shook a whimsical head at Racey Dawson.

"Whatsa use?" he asked sorrowfully. "Whatsa use?"

"YOU was too easy with him," declared Swing, as he and Racey were unsaddling at the Bar S corral. "You could 'a' stuck him for three hundred a month just as easy."

Racey shook a decided head.

"No, there's a limit even to old Salt's stubbornness. I know him better'n you do— Aw, what yuh kickin' about? We got enough coin in our overalls to last out six months, if you don't drink too much."

"If I don't drink too much, hey? If I don't drink too much! Which I like that. Who's——"

"Racey," interrupted Tom Loudon, who had approached unperceived, "this is a fine way to treat yore friends."

"What's bitin' you?"

"You hadn't oughta take advantage of old Salt thisaway."

"An' why not? What's wrong with the bet? Fair bet. Leave it to anybody."

"Shore, shore, but alla same, Racey, you'd oughta gone a li'l easy. Twenty-four hundred dollars——"

"What's the dif? You won't have to pay it."

" 'T'sall right, but I didn't think it of you, —— if I did. You knowed how old Salt is—always certain shore he's right, an' you took advantage."

"Shore I took advantage," Racey acquiesced amiably. "I got sense, I have. Alla same, he'd never 'a' took me up if you hadn't slipped in yore li'l piece of advice for him not to. That was a bad play, Tom. You might know he'd go dead against yuh. But I ain't complainin', not me. Nor Swing ain't, either. We'll thank yuh for yore helpin' hand to our dying day."

"I guess you will," Tom Loudon said ruefully. "When you get through here, Racey, you an' Swing come on over to the wagon-shed. I wanna sift through this Jack Harpe business once more."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BAR S

"Kind friends, you must pity my horrible tale,
I'm an object of sorrow, I'm lookin' quite stale.
I gave up my trade sellin' Pink's Patent Pills
To go huntin' gold in the dreary Black Hills."

"I wish to —— you'd stayed there," said Jimmie, the Bar S cook, pausing in his march past to poke his head in at the bunk-house doorway. "Honest, Racey, don't you ever get tired of yell-bellerin' thisaway?"

Racey Dawson, standing in front of the mirror, ceased not to adjust his necktie. The mirror was small and he was not, and it was only by dint of much wriggling that he was succeeding in his purpose.

"Don't go away; stay at home if you can,
Stay away from that city; they call it Cheyenne."

"Seemin'ly he don't get tired," Jimmie answered the question for himself. "An' what's more he don't ever get tired of dandy-floppin' himself all up like King Solomon's pet pony. Yup," Jimmie continued with enthusiasm, addressing the world at large, "I can remember when Racey used to ride for the 88 an' the Cross-in-a-box, how he was a regular two-legged human bein'. A handkerchief round his neck was good enough for him always.

"If his pants had a rip in 'em anywheres, or they was buttons off his vest or his shirt was tore, did it matter? No, it didn't matter. It didn't matter a-tall. But now he's gotta buy new pants if his old ones is tore, an' a new shirt besides, an' he sews the buttons on his vest, an' he's took to wearin' a necktie. A necktie!"

Jimmie, words failing him for the moment, paused and hooked one foot comfortably behind the other. He leaned hip-shot against the door-jamb and spat accurately through a knot-hole in the bunk-house floor

"Yop," he went on, ramming his quid into the angle of his jaw, "an' he's always admirin' himself in the mirror, Racey is. He pats his hair down, after partin' it an' usin' enough goose-grease on it to keep forty guns from rustin' for ten years, an' he shines his boots with blackin', *my* stove-blackin', the rustlin' scoundrel. Scrouge southwest a li'l more, Racey, an' look at yore chin. They's a li'l speck o' dust on it. Oh me, oh my! Li'l sweetheart will have to wash his face again. Who is she?"

Still Racey did not deign to reply. He placed, removed and replaced a garnet stick-pin in the necktie a dozen times hand-running. Jimmie beat the long roll with knuckles on the bottom of the frying-pan and winked at the broad back of Racey Dawson.

"I hear they's a new hasher at Bill Lainey's hotel," pursued the indefatigable Jimmie. "Tim Page told me she only weighed three hundred pounds without her shoes. It ain't her? Don't tell me it's her! You ain't, are you, Racey?"

Racey, pivoting on a spurred heel, faced Jimmie and stuck his arms akimbo, and spoke.

"Not mentionin' any names, of course, but there's some people round here got a awful lot to say. Which if a gent was to say their tongues are hung in the middle he'd be only tellin' half the truth. Not that you ain't popular with me, James. You are. I think the world of you. How can I help it when you remind me alla time of my aunt's pet parrot in yore face an' language? Except you ain't the right color. If yore whiskers only growed out green."

"We're forgettin' what we was talkin' about," tucked in Jimmie the cook, smiling sweetly. "The lady, Racey. Who is she?"

"James," said Racey, his smile matching that of the cook, "they's somethin' about you today, somethin' I don't like. I dunno the name for it exactly. But if you'll step inside the bunk-house a minute, I'll show you what I mean. I'll show you in two shakes."

Jimmie shook a wise head and backed out into the open.

"Not while I got my health. You come out here an' show me."

"Oh, I ain't gonna play any tricks on yuh," protested Racey Dawson.

"You bet you ain't," Jimmie concurred warmly. "Not by severial jugfuls. I—" He broke off, cocking a listening ear.

"Yeah," grinned Racey, "yuh hear a noise in the cook-shack, huh? I thought I seen the Kid slide past in the lookin'-glass while you was standin' in the doorway."

"An' you never told me!" squalled Jimmie, speeding toward his beloved place of business.

He reached it rather late. When he entered by the doorway the Kid, a pie in each hand, was disappearing through a back window.

"Did you ever get left!" tossed back the Kid as the flung frying-pan buzzed past his ear. "Now see what yuh done," he continued, skipping safely out of range; "dented yore nice new fry-pan all up. You oughtn'ta done that, Jimmie. Fry-pans cost money. Some day if you ain't careful you'll break somethin', you an' yore temper."

"Them's the Old Man's pies," declared Jimmie, leaning over the window-sill and shaking an indignant fist at the Kid. "You bring 'em back, yuh hear?"

"They ain't, an' I won't, an' I do," was the brisk answer. "Yo're makin' a big mistake, Jimmie boy, if you think they're his pies. Don't you s'pose I know he's gone to Piegan City, an' he won't be back for a coupla weeks? An' don't you s'pose I know them pies would be too stale for him to eat by the time he got back? You must take me for a fool, Jimmie. An' you lied to me, Jimmie, you lied. Just for that I'll keep these pies. I'll keep 'em an' eat 'em no matter how big a pain I get, an' let this be a lesson to you. Hey, Racey, Jimmie gimme a coupla pies! C'mon out an' we'll eat 'em where Jimmie can watch us."

"If I catch you—" began the angry Jimmie.

"But you ain't gonna catch me," tantalized the Kid. "C'mon, Racey, hurry up."

Racey came slowly and with dignity.

The Kid stared.

"Well, I'll be ——! Where are you goin'?"

"Ride, just a li'l ride," was the vague explanation.

"Is that all? I thought it was a funeral or a weddin' or somethin', an' I was wonderin'. Just a li'l ride, huh? An' where might you be a-goin' to ride to, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"You can ask, of course," replied Racey, shrugging his wide shoulders and spreading his hands after the fashion of Telescope Laguerre.

"But that ain't sayin' he'll tell you," put in Jimmie. "Bet you he's gonna go see that new hasher of Bill Lainey's."

"No," denied the Kid judicially, "not that lady. Even Racey's arms ain't long enough to reach round her. I— Say, one o' these pies is a raisin pie!"

"You can gimme that one," suggested Racey Dawson, glad of an opportunity to change the subject.

The Kid, his teeth sunk in the raisin pie, shook a decisive head and mumbled unintelligibly. He thrust the other pie toward his friend.

RACEY DAWSON rode away westward, munching pie. It was a very good pie and would have brought credit to any cook. He regretfully ate the last crumb and rolled a cigaret. He felt fairly full and at utter peace with the world. Why not? Wasn't it a good old world, and a mighty friendly world despite the Harpes and Tweezys and Joneses that infested it? I should say so.

Racey Dawson inhaled luxuriously, pushed back his wide hat and let the breeze ruffle his brown hair. He rubbed the back of one hand across his straight eyebrows and stared across the range toward the distant hills that marked his goal. Which goal was the old C Y ranch-house at Moccasin Spring on Soogan Creek, where lived the Dales and their daughter Molly.

And as he looked at the hill and bethought him of what lay beyond it, he drew

a Winchester from the scabbard under his left leg and made sure that he had not forgotten to load it. For Racey labored under no delusion as to the danger that menaced not only his own existence but that of his friend, Swing. He knew that their lives hung by a thread, and a thin thread at that.

They were but two against many and their position had not been aided by the string of uneventful days succeeding their advent at the Bar S. For their enemies were taking their time in the launching of their enterprise. And Racey had not expected this. It threw him off his balance somewhat. Certainly it worried him.

It was not humanly possible that Jack Harpe could be aware that Old Man Saltoun did not believe what Racey had told him. But he was acting as if he knew. Perhaps he was waiting till Nebraska Jones should be entirely well of his wound. That was possible but not probable. Jack Harpe had not impressed Racey as a man who would allow his plans to be indefinitely held up for such a cause. There was no telling when Nebraska would be up and about. His recovery, thanks to past dissipations, had been exceedingly slow.

Again, perhaps the delay might be merely a detail of the plan fat Jakey Pooley mentioned in his letter to Luke Tweezy, or it might be due to the more than watchful care the Dales and Morgans were taking of old Mr. Dale. Wherever the old gentleman went some one of his relatives went with him. Certainly no ill-wisher had been able to approach Mr. Dale, since his spree at McFluke's, at any time. Mr. Dale to all intents and purposes was impossible to isolate.

At any rate, whatever the reason, the fact remained that Harpe had not moved and showed no signs of moving. Mr. Saltoun, every time he met Racey, took special pains to ask his puncher how much twice six times two hundred is. Then Mr. Saltoun, without waiting for an answer, would walk off, slapping his leg and cackling with laughter. Even Tom Loudon was beginning to take the view that perhaps his father-in-law was in the right after all.

"Yuh been here near two months now, Racey," he had said that very morning, "an' they ain't nothin' happened yet."

"I got four months to go," Racey had replied with a placidity he did not feel.

Now as he rode, his eyes closely scanning the various places in the landscape providing good cover for possible bushwhackers, he recalled what Loudon had said.

"I'll show him all the happenstances he wants to see before I'm through," he said aloud. "Somethin' gonna happen. Somethin's gotta happen. Jack Harpe won't let this slide. Not by a jugful."

The words were confident enough, but they were words that he had been in the habit of repeating to himself nearly every day for some time. Perhaps they had lost some of their force. Perhaps——

"Twelve hundred dollars," mused Racey. "An' the same for Swing. Six months' work for— ——, it can't turn out different! I know it can't. We'll show 'em all yet, won't we, Cuter, old settler?"

Cuter, old settler, waggled his ears. He was a companionable horse, never kicked human beings and bucked but seldom.

"Yep," continued Racey, sitting back against the cantle, "she's a long creek that don't bend some'ers or other."

And then the creek that was his flow of thought shot round a bend into the broad and sparkling reaches of a much pleasanter subject than the one that had to do with Harpes and Tweezys and Joneses. After a time he came to where the pleasanter subject, on her knees, was weeding among the flowers that grew tidily round Moccasin Spring. Baby-blue-eyes, low and lovely, cuddled down between tall red columbines and orange wallflowers. Side by side with the pink geranium of old-fashioned gardens the wild geranium nodded its lavender blooms in perfect harmony.

The subject, black-haired Molly Dale, rested the point of her hand-fork between two rows of ragged sailors and Johnny-jump-ups and lifted a pair of the clearest, softest blue eyes in the world in greeting to Racey Dawson.

"This is a fine time for you to be traipsing in," she told him, with a smile that revealed a deep dimple in each cheek. "I thought you promised to help me weed my garden today."

"I did," he returned humbly, dismounting and sliding the reins over Cuter's neck and head, "but you know how it is Sunday mornin's, Molly. There's a lot to do round the ranch sometimes. Now this mornin'——"

"I'll bet," she interrupted, smoothing out the smile and frowning as severely as

she was able. "I'd just tell a man that, I would. I would indeed. I'm sure it must have taken you at least half an hour to shine those boots. Half an hour! More likely an hour. Why, I can see my face in them."

"An' a very pretty face, too," said Racey, rising to the occasion. "If I owned that face I'd never stop lookin' at it myself. I mean—" He floundered, aghast at his own temerity.

But the lady merely smiled.

"That'll do," she cautioned him. "Don't try to flirt with me. I won't have it."

"I ain't—" he began, and stopped.

Molly Dale continued to look at him inquiringly. But as he gave no evidence of completing the sentence, she lowered her gaze and resumed her weeding. Racey thought he had glimpsed a disappointed look in her eyes as she dropped her chin, but he could not be certain. Probably he had been mistaken Why should she be disappointed? Why, indeed?

"Start in on that bed, Racey," she directed, nodding her head toward the columbines and wallflowers. "There's some of that miserable pusley inching in on the baby-blue-eyes, and they're such tiny things it doesn't take much to kill them. And Lord knows I had a hard enough job persuading 'em to grow in the first place."

"Wild things never cotton to livin' inside a fence," he told her. "They're like Injuns thataway—put 'em in a house an' they don't do so well."

"Shucks, look at the Rainbow."

"Half-breed. There's the difference, an' besides the Rainbow ain't lived in a house since she left the convent. She lives in a tepee same as her uncle an' aunts."

"I don't care," defended Molly, on her knees to survey her garden. "Every single plant in my garden except the pink geraniums is wild. Look at those thimbleberry bushes round the spring, and the blue camas along the brook, and the squaw-bushes round the house, and the squaw-grass and pussy-paws back of the clothes-lines. Some I transplanted; the rest I grew from seeds. And where will you find a better-looking garden?"

Racey sagged back on his heels and stared critically about him.

"Yeah," he drawled, nodding a slow head, "they do look pretty good. Gotta give yuh lots o' credit. But them squaw-bushes, now——"

He broke off, grinning.

"Oh, of course, you provoking thing!" cried she, irately. "Might know you'd pick on those squaw-bushes. It is a mite too shady for 'em where they are, but still they're doing pretty well, considering. I'm satisfied—What's that?"

"THAT" was a horseman appearing suddenly among the cottonwoods beyond the spring. The horseman was Lanpher, manager of the 88 ranch. He was followed by another rider, a lean, swarthy individual with a smooth-shaven saturnine face. Racey knew the latter by sight and reputation. The man was one Skeel and rejoiced in the nickname of "Alicran." The furtive scorpion whose sting is death is not indigenous to the territory, but Mr. Skeel had gained the appellation in New Mexico, a region where the tail-bearing insect may be found, and when the man left the Border for the Border's good the name left with him.

"Oh, look out! The bushes! The bushes! Don't trample my thimbleberries!"

But Lanpher, heeding not at all Molly's cries of warning, spurred his sweating horse through the thimbleberry growth, breaking down three shrubs, and splashed cat-a-corneredly across the spring, the brook and several rows of flowers.

The garden looked as if a miniature cyclone had passed that way.

Mid-way across the garden Lanpher's horse halted—halted because a flying figure in chaps had appeared from nowhere and seized it by the rein. But the horse did more than halt. In obedience to a powerful jerk administered by the man in chaps the horse pivoted on its forelegs and slid its rider out of the saddle and deposited him a-sprawl and face downward among the flowers.

Lanpher arose, snarling, to face a leveled six-shooter. It did not signify that Racey had not drawn the weapon. He was perfectly capable of shooting through the bottom of his holster and Lanpher knew it. And Racey knew that he knew it.

"Get out o' this garden!" ordered Racey. "Take yore friend with you," he added, tossing the horse's bridle to Lanpher. "An' if I were you I'd walk a heap careful between the rows. I just wouldn't go a-bustin' any more o' these posies."

Lanpher went. He went carefully. He

was followed quite as carefully by Racey Dawson.

When Lanpher was free of the neat rows he looked up venomously into the face of Alicran Skeel, who had meticulously ridden round the garden.

"I was wonderin' where you was," Lanpher remarked with deep meaning.

"I ain't rootin' up nobody's gyarden," Alicran returned cheerfully. "An' don't wonder too hard. Might strain yore intellect or somethin'. I'll always be where I aim to be—always. You done scratched yore face, Lanpher."

Lanpher turned from Alicran Skeel and spat upon the ground

"Alicran," said Racey, holding his alert attitude, "the first false move you make Lanpher gets it."

"I ain't makin' a move," said Alicran, thumbs hooked in the armholes of his vest. "I got plenty to do mindin' my own business."

"Huh!" Thus the skeptical Racey, who did not trust Mr. Skeel as far as he could throw a horse by the tail.

"Shucks," said Alicran, out of deference to the lady, "you don't believe me."

"Shore I do," asserted Racey. "Shore, yuh bet yuh. I— *Careful, Lanpher*! I can talk to somebody else an' watch you at the same time!"

"If Alicran was worth a—" began Lanpher furiously, and stopped.

"You was gonna say—what?" queried Alicran softly.

"Nothin'," said Lanpher sulkily. "Put yore gun away," he continued to Racey. "I ain't gonna hurt yuh."

"Now that's what I call downright generous of you, Lanpher," Racey declared warmly. "I'd shore hate to be hurt. I shore would. But if it's alla same to you, I'll keep my gun right where she is—if it's alla same to you."

"That'll do, Racey. Stop this rowing. I won't have it." It was Molly Dale pushing past Racey and standing with arms akimbo directly in front of his gun-muzzle. Racey let his gun and holster fall up-and-down, but he did not remove his hand from the gun-butt.

"Who do you want here?" Molly inquired of Lanpher.

Lanpher's rat-like features cracked into an ugly smile. "Is yore paw home?" he asked.

"Father's gone to Marysville."

"When'll he be back?"

"Day after tomorrow, I guess."

"Yeah, I kind o' guess he'd want to spend the night so's he could do business in the mornin', huh?" The Lanpher smile grew even uglier.

"He has some business to attend to in the morning; yes."

"I kind o' thought he would. Yeah. You don't happen to know the nature of his business, do you?"

"His business is none of yours, and I'll thank you to pick up your feet and clear out, the pair of you."

"Not so fast." Lanpher spread deprecatory hands, and his smile became suddenly crooked. "I just come down to do yore paw a favor."

"A favor? You?" Blank unbelief was patent in Molly's tone and expression.

"A favor. Me. You see, yore paw's got a mortgage comin' due on the tenth, an' the reason yore paw went to Marysville was so he could be there bright an' early tomorrow mornin' at the bank to renew the mortgage. Ain't I right?"

"You might be." Molly's face was now a mask of indifference, but there was no indifference in her heart. There was cold fear.

Racey's expression was likewise indifferent. But there was no fear in his heart. There was anger, cold anger. For he had sensed what was coming. He knew that the previous Winter had been a hard one on the Dale fortunes. They had lost most of their little bunch of cattle in a blizzard, and the roof of their stable had collapsed, killing two team-horses and a riding-pony.

Racey had conjectured that Mr. Dale would have been forced to borrow on mortgage to make a fresh start in the Spring. And at that time in the territory the legal rate was twelve per cent. Stiff? To be sure. But the security in those days was never gilt-edged; cattle were prone to die at inconvenient moments, and land was was not worth what it was east of the Mississippi.

"We'll take it I'm right," pursued Lanpher, lapping his tongue round the words as if they possessed taste and that taste pleasant. "An' bein' that I'm right I'll say yore paw could 'a' saved himself the ride to Marysville by stayin' to home."

Oh, Lanpher was the sort of man who, as

a boy, was accustomed to enjoy thoroughly the pastime of pulling wings from living flies and drowning a helpless kitten by inches.

Now he nodded his head and grinned anew and put up a satisfied hand and rubbed his stubbly chin. Racey yearned to kick him. It was shameful that Molly should be compelled to bandy words with this reptile. Racey stepped forward determinedly and slid past Molly.

Promptly she caught him by the sleeve. "Don't mix in, Racey," she commanded with set face. "It's all right. It's all right, I tell you."

"'Course it's all right," Lanpher hastened to say, more than a hint of worriment in his little black eyes. One could never be sure of these Bar S boys. They were uncertain propositions, every measly one of them. "Shore it's all right," went on the 88 manager. "I ain't meanin' no harm. Yo're takin' a lot for granted, Racey, a whole lot for granted."

"Nev' mine what I'm takin' for granted," flung back Racey. "I get along with takin' only what's mine anyway."

Which was equivalent to saying that Lanpher was a thief. But Lanpher overlooked the poorly veiled insult and switched his gaze to Molly Dale.

"I just rid over to say," he told her, "that if yore paw is still set on renewin' the mortgage when he comes back from Marysville he'll have to see me an' Luke Tweezy at the 88. We done bought that mortgage from the bank."

Molly Dale said nothing. Racey felt that if he held his tongue another second he would incontinently burst. He sidestepped past the girl.

"You've said yore li'l piece," he told Lanpher, "an' for a feller who was bellyachin' so loud about keepin' out o' this deal it strikes me yo're a-gettin' in good an' deep—buyin' up mortgages an' all. Dunno what I mean, huh? Yep, you do. Shore you do. Think back. Think way back, an' it'll come to you. Jack Harpe. You know him. Bossy-lookin' jigger, seemed like. Has he been a-bearin' down on yuh lately, Lanpher? Mustn't let him run yuh thataway. Bad business. Might be expensive. You can't tell. You be careful, Lanpher. You go slow—a mite slow. Yep. Well, don't lemme keep you. This way out."

He flicked a thumb westward and stared at Lanpher with bright eyes. Lanpher's eyes dropped, lifted, then veered toward Alicran Skeel, that appreciative observer, who continued to sit his horse as good as gold and silent as a clam.

LANPHER turned to his horse without another word, slid the reins over the animal's neck and crossed them slackly. He stuck toe in stirrup and swung up. He looked down at Molly where she stood dumbly, her troubled eyes gazing at nothing and the fingers of one hand slowly plaiting and unplaiting a corner of her apron. Lanpher opened his mouth as if to speak but no words issued, for Racey had coughed a peremptory cough. Lanpher turned his horse's head toward the creek.

"Lookit here, Alicran," the peevish Lanpher burst forth when he and his henchman had forded the creek and were riding westward, "whatsa matter with you anyway?"

"With me?" Alicran tilted a questioning head. "I dunno. I don't feel a mite sick."

"What do you think I hired you for?" Heatedly.

"—— he knows." Business of rolling a cigaret.

"Yo're supposed to be a two-legged man with a gun."

"Yeah?" Indifferently.

"Yeah, but I got my doubts—now. ——s bells! wasn't you off to one side there when Racey pulled? Wasn't you?"

"Wasn't you listenin' to what Racey said at the time? Wasn't you?"

"After! I mean after! His gun was back huggin' his leg after the girl slid in between. What more of a chance didja want?"

"So that's it, huh?"

"That's—it." Between the two words was a perceptible pause.

"I ain't shootin' nobody in the back. I never have yet, an' I ain't beginnin' now, not for you or any other —— man."

"Say—" began Lanpher threateningly.

Alicran Skeel turned a grim face on his employer so suddenly and sharply that Lanpher almost dodged.

"Lookit here, Lanpher," said he quietly, "don't you try to start nothin' that I'll have to finish. I know you from way back,

you lizard, an' outside of my regular work I ain't takin' no orders from you. Don't gimme any more of yore lip."

"Aw, I didn't mean nothin', Alicran. You ain't got no call to get het. I need you in the business."

"Shore you do," Alicran declared contemptuously. "You need me to do anythin' you ain't got the nerve to do."

"I got my duty to my company," Lanpher bluffed lamely.

"Duty be ——. You ain't got the guts for a tough job; that's whatsa matter."

This was rubbing it in. Lanpher plucked at the loose strings of his courage, and managed to draw out a faintly responsive twang.

"I'll show you whether I got guts—" he began.

"Oh, look," said Alicran. "See that wild-currant-bush."

To Lanpher it seemed that the six-shooter was barely out of the holster before it was back again. But there was a swirl of smoke adrift in the windless air and the topmost branch of a wild-currant-bush thirty feet distant had been that instant cut in two.

"What was that you was gonna say?" Alicran prompted softly.

"I forget," evaded Lanpher. "But they's one thing you wanna remember, Alicran. It don't pay to be squeamish. It comes high in the end usual. You'll find if you keep on bein' mushy thisaway, that you'll have more'n you can swing at the finish."

"Is that so? You leave me do things my way, do yuh hear? Lemme tell you if I'd 'a' knowed all what you was up to by comin' to Dale's this mornin' I'd never have allowed it."

"Allowed it!"

"Yes, allowed it, I said. Want me to spell it for you? You thumb-handed idjit, if you had any more sense you'd be a —— fool. Don't you know that in anythin' yuh do, no matter what, they's no profit in unnecessary trimmin's? Most always it's the extra frills on a feller's work that pushes the bridge over an' lands him underneath with everythin' on top of him an' the job to do again, if he's lucky enough to be livin' at the finish.

"An' yore swashin' through that girl's gyarden was a heap unnecessary. It was a close squeak you wasn't drilled by Racey Dawson. I wouldn't blamed him if he had let a little light in on yore darkened soul. Done it myself in his place. An' yore rubbin' in that mortgage deal was another unnecessary piece o' —— foolishness. It only made Racey have it in for yuh more'n ever.

"An after actin' like more kinds of a fool thataway in less time than anybody I ever see before you sit up on yore hunkers an' tell *me* I'll have more'n I can swing at the finish. Say, you make me laugh. Listen, Lanpher, for a feller that's come out second best with the Bar S outfit as many times as you have it looks to me like you was crowdin' Providence a heap close."

"That's all right," sulked Lanpher, then added, with a sudden flare of spite—

"When I hired you as foreman I shore never expected to draw a sky-pilot full o' sermons into the bargain."

"No?" drawled Alicran, looking hard at Lanpher. "I often wonder just what you did hire me for."

On which Lanpher made no comment.

"Yeah," resumed Alicran, the fish having failed to bite. "I often wonder about that. Was it a foreman you wanted or a gunman? An' what did Racey mean about Jack Harpe a-bearin' down on yuh so hard, huh?"

"Nothin', nothin', nothin' a-tall," Lanpher replied irritably.

"If Racey didn't mean nothin' by it, what did yore eyes flip for an' why didja shuffle yore feet?"

"What th' —— business is it of yores?" burst out the goaded manager.

"None," Alicran replied calmly. "I was just wonderin'. I got a curiosity to know why, thassall."

"Then hogtie yore curiosity or you'll be gettin' yore time. I'm free to admit I need you, like I said before, but I can do without yuh if I gotta."

"That's just where yo're dead wrong," Alicran promptly contradicted. "You can't do without me. Lanpher, I like the job of bein' yore foreman. I like it so well that if you was to fire me I dunno what I wouldn't do. You know, Lanpher, a man is a whole lot bigger target than the branch of a wild-currant-bush?"

Frankly speculative, the eyes of Alicran traveled up and down the spare frame of the 88 manager. Which gave Lanpher furiously to think, as it were.

"Why," said he, forcing a smile, "I guess we understand each other, Alicran."

"Shore we do," said Alicran cheerfully. "An' don't you forget it."

CHAPTER XVII

SIGNED PAPER

WHEN the two 88 men had departed Molly Dale continued to stand where she was for a space and stare dumbly at nothing. Racey, realizing well enough that her world had crashed to pieces about her, wished that she would burst into tears. A sobbing woman is easily comforted. It is simply necessary to pet her and keep on petting her till her grief is assuaged. But this hard stillness of Molly Dale's gave Racey no opening. He could but gaze at her uncomfortably and shift his weight from one foot to the other.

"That was a dirty trick of that Marysville bank." Thus tentatively.

It is doubtful whether Molly heard him.

"Poor father," she said in a low tone.

"Lookit here, Molly," said Racey, struck by a bright idea. "I got a li'l money I been savin'. I—I want you should take it."

Molly continued to stare into the distance.

"I got some money—" he began again, thinking that Molly had not heard.

But she turned her face toward him at that, and he saw that her eyes were shining with unshed tears.

"Racey," she said, with a slight catch in her voice, and laid her hand lightly on his arm, "Racey, you're a dear, good boy. We—we'll manage somehow. I mum-must tell mother."

Abruptly she swung away and left him. He watched her cross the garden and enter the kitchen of the ranch-house. Then slowly, thoughtfully, he set to work repairing as best he could the ravages left in the garden by the hoofs of Lanpher's horse.

Came then Swing Tunstall on a paint pony and was moved to mirth at sight of Racey Dawson engaged in earthy labor.

"See the pret-ty flow-ers," mouthed Swing Tunstall, after the fashion of a child wrestling with the first reader. "Does Racey like pret-ty flow-ers? Yeth, he'th crathy ab-out them. Ain't he cute, squattin' there all same hop-toad an' a-workin' away two-handed? Only he ain't a-workin' now. He's stopped workin'. He's gettin' all red in the face. He's mad at Swing who never done him no harm nohow. Whatsa matter, Racey?" he added in his natural voice. "What bit you on the ear this fine an' Summer day?"

Racey looked over his shoulder toward the house. Then he got to his feet and strode across the garden to where Swing Tunstall sat his horse.

"Swing," said he quietly, "are you busy just now?".

Swing, suspecting a catch somewhere, stared in swift suspicion. "Why-uh-no," was his cautious reply.

"Then go off some'ers an' die."

Without waiting for Swing's possible comment, Racey turned his back on his friend and walked unhurriedly to his horse, Cuter. Swing slouched sidewise in the saddle and watched him go.

He rolled a cigaret, lighted it, and inhaled luxuriously. And all without removing his gaze from Racey's back. He watched while Racey flung the reins crosswise over Cuter's neck, mounted, and rode down into the creek. When he saw that Racey, after allowing Cuter to drink nearly all he wanted, rode on across the creek and up the farther bank, Swing's brow became corrugated with a puzzled frown.

"He means business," muttered Swing. "I ain't seen that look on his face for some time. I wonder what did happen here this mornin'."

His eyes still fixed on the dwindling westward moving object that was Racey Dawson and his horse, he smoked his cigaret to a butt. Then he picked up his reins, found his stirrups and rode away.

Racey Dawson, bound for the 88 ranch-house, did not smoke. He did not feel like it. He did not feel like doing anything but facing Lanpher. What he would be moved to do while facing Lanpher he was not sure. Time enough to cross that bridge when the crucial moment would arrive. He knew what he wanted to do, but he knew, too, that he could not do it unless Lanpher made the first break. Otherwise it would be murder, and Racey was no murderer.

"He'll back down if he can, the snake," Racey said aloud. "An' he'll be shore to slick an' slime round till all's blue. —— him, ridin' over them flowers of hers!"

Racey did not hurry. He had no desire to come up with Lanpher on the open range. It would be better to meet the man at his own ranch-house where there were likely to be plenty of witnesses. Racey realized perfectly that he might need a witness, several witnesses, before the sun set. He hoped that all the boys of the 88 outfit would be

at the ranch. He hoped that Luke Tweezy would be there, too. Lanpher and Tweezy together, the pups.

"Fat Jakey Pooley's li'l playmates," he muttered and swore again heartily.

He understood now the true reason for Jack Harpe's lack of activity. This purchasing by Lanpher and Tweezy of the Dale mortgage was the eminently safe and lawful plan of Jakey Pooley. In his letter fat Jakey had written that it would take longer. And wasn't it taking longer? It was. Racey thought he saw the plan in its entirety, and was in a boil accordingly. He would have been in considerably more of a boil had he been blessed with the ability to read the future.

When he rode in among the buildings of the 88 ranch his eyes were gratified by the sight of freckle-faced Bill Allen straddling a cracker-box in front of the bunk-house and having his hair cut by Rod Rockwell.

"That's right," Bill Allen was complaining. "Why in —— don't yuh cut off the whole ear while yo're about it?"

"Aw, shut up," said Rod Rockwell. "It was only the tip, an' I didn't go to cut it anyway."

"I don't give a —— whether yuh went to cut it or not, yuh cut it! I can feel the blood runnin' down the back of my neck."

"That's only sweat, you bellerin' calf! Hold still, can't yuh? Djuh want me to hurt yuh?"

"You done have already," snarled Bill Allen, fidgeting on his cracker-box. "You wait till I cut yore hair after. I'll fix you, I'll scalp you, you pot-walloper."

"That's right, Bill," said Racey, checking his horse beside the quarreling pair. "Talk to him. Give'm ——"

"'Lo, Racey," grinned the two youngsters.

"Where did you rustle this hoss?" asked Bill Allen.

"Nev' mine where," smiled Racey, for both Bill and Rod had been his friends in his 88 days and could therefore insult him with impunity. "I wouldn't wanna put li'l boys in the way of temptation. Does the cook still spank him regular, Rod?"

"Stick his hoss with the scissors, Rod," begged Bill Allen. "Let's see what for a rider Mr. Dawson is."

RACEY pressed his off-rein against his horse's neck. The animal whirled on a nickel, and reared, hard held, after the first plunge. The flying pebbles plentifully showered the two punchers. Bill Allen swore heartily, for one of the pebbles had clipped his damaged ear.

"You see what a good rider I am," Racey said sweetly. "Can't faze me nohow. Sit still, Bill, an' lemme try can I jump the li'l hoss over you. Rod, do yuh mind movin' back a yard?"

"No," said Bill Allen decidedly, and picked up his cracker-box and retreated backward to the bunk-house door. "No, you don't play no such tricks as that on me. He'd just as soon try it as not, the idjit," he added over his shoulder to Tile Stanton, who was peering out to see what all the racket was about.

"Let him try it," Tile Stanton advised promptly. "If the cayuse does happen to hit yore head it won't hurt yore thick skull. G'on. Be a sport."

"Be a sport yoreself," returned Bill Allen, skipping into the bunk-house. "Where's them other scissors? I'll finish this job myself."

Racey, left alone with Rod Rockwell, smiled slightly. "Bill ain't got a sense of humor this mornin'," he observed softly. "He must 'a' thought I meant it."

There was no answering smile on Rod's features as he looked up at Racey Dawson. "Racey," said he, laying a hand on the horse's mane, "have you been to McFluke's lately?"

"I ain't," replied Racey, his smile fading out.

"Then keep on stayin' away."

"As bad as that?"

"As bad as that."

"McFluke been talkin'?" was Racey's next question.

"If McFluke was the only one it would be a mighty short hoss to curry."

"Then there are others?"

"Plenty." Rod Rockwell gave a short, hard laugh.

"All of Nebraska's bunch, huh?"

"All but Nebraska."

"How long has this been goin' on—this talkin', I mean?"

"Doc Coffin started it about a week ago. He told Windy Taylor of the Double Diamond A he was gonna ventilate yore good health some fine day. He wasn't drunk, neither."

"Then he must have serious intentions."

"Somethin' like that. Five of us heard

him say it. Lookit, while I was at McFluke's alone day before yesterday Doc an' Peaches Austin an' Honey Hoke was all three bellyin' the bar, an' while I was tuckin' away my nose-paint they was mumblin' to themselves how you was all kinds of a pup an' would stand shootin' any day."

"Mumblin' loud enough for you to hear, huh?"

"Naturally, or I wouldn't 'a' heard it."

"Then they wanted you to hear. Guess they know yo're a friend of mine."

"Guess they do now," Rod Rockwell said grimly.

"What do yuh mean?"

"Oh, nothin'. I just talked to'em a li'l bit."

"An' you wasn't shot? Didn't they do nothin'?"

"—— no," Rod denied disgustedly. "Kansas Casey come in just at the wrong time, an' throwed down on the four of us an' said he'd do all the shootin' they was to be done. An' when he went he took me with him. Said he'd arrest me if I didn't go peaceable. Ain't that just like Kansas?"

"Wearin' the star shore means a lot to him."

"Aw, since he's been deputy he's gotten too big for his boots. An' Jake the same way. The country's played out, that's whatsa matter. Law an' order, law an' order, till a feller can't turn round no more without fallin' into jail."

"She's one lucky thing for you, cowboy," said Racey seriously, "that Kansas did come. Three of 'em! You had yore gall. Lookit here, next time you let 'em talk. Names don't hurt less they're said to a feller's face."

"They knowed you was my friend," said Rod simply. "Anyway, you keep away from McFluke's."

"Maybe I will take yore advice. It has its points of interest, as the feller said when he sat down on the porkumpine. An' speakin' of porkumpines, have you seen Lanpher?"

"Shore. Him an' Alicran pulled in a hour ago. Guess he's in the office—Lanpher."

"See anythin' of Tweezy lately?"

"Luke seems to be livin' with us lately."

"I never knowed him an' Lanpher was good friends?" Racey cast at a venture.

"I didn't either till lately."

"Jack Harpe ever come out here?"

"Long-geared feller, supposed to have capital? Hangs out in Farewell? The one that Marie girl tried to down? No, he ain't been here as I know of, but then he could easy drift in an' out an' me not know it."

Racey nodded. "Marie jump Jack again, do yuh know?" he asked.

"—— if I know. Don't guess so, though. I seen her pass him on Main Street, an' she didn't even look at him."

"I'll bet he looked at her."

"You can gamble he did. He ain't trustin' her, not him. I wonder what was at the bottom of the fuss between him an' her?" A sharp glance at Racey accompanied this remark.

"I dunno," yawned Racey. "They say Mr. Harpe has had a career both high, wide an' handsome."

"That's what I'd call one too many," grinned Rod Rockwell.

"You can put down a bet the career has been one too many, too."

"Yeah," said Rod, wondering what was coming next.

"Yeah," said Racey, nodding mysteriously, but disappointing his friend by immediately changing the subject. "Say Rod, I'd take it as a favor if you an' Tile an' Bill would sort of freeze round the bunkhouse till after I'm through with Lanpher."

"Shore," said Rod. "Tweezy's in the office too, I guess."

Racey nodded and started his horse toward the office.

He understood well enough that Rod and the other two punchers would not interfere in any way with him and whatever acts he might be called upon to perform during his conversation with Lanpher. Loyal to the last cartridge and after, whenever it was ranch business, none of the 88 punchers ever felt it incumbent upon him to go out of his way so far as Lanpher personally was concerned. The manager was not the man either to engender or foster personal loyalty.

At the open doorway of the office Racey dismounted. He dropped the reins over his horse's head and walked to the doorway. There he stopped and looked in. He saw Lanpher sitting behind his big home-made desk. Lanpher was watching him. At one side of the desk, on a chair tilted back against the wall, sat Luke Tweezy. Luke was chewing a straw. His eyes were half-closed, but Racey detected their glitter. Luke Tweezy was not overlooking any bets at that moment.

RACEY stepped across the door-sill and halted just within the room. The thumb of his left hand was hooked in his belt. His right hand hung at his side. He was ready for action.

"Lanpher," said Racey without preliminary, "I wanna serve notice on you here an' now that if I catch you within one mile of Moccasin Spring you'll come a-shootin' 'cause I will."

Lanpher's hand remained motionless on the desk-top. Then the man picked up a pencil and began to tap it on the wood. He licked his lips cat-fashion.

"Is that a threat or a promise?" he asked.

"You can take it she's both," Racey told him.

"You hear that, Luke?" Lanpher turned to Luke Tweezy. "Threatenin' my life, huh?"

"Shore," nodded Luke Tweezy. "Actionable, that is. Mustn't threaten a man's life, Racey. Against the law, yuh know."

Racey moved to one side and leaned his back comfortably against the wall.

"Against the law, huh, Luke?" he said nervously. "Then I can be arrested?"

"Yuh can." Luke Tweezy declared with evident relish. "That is, yuh can if Lanpher wants to make a complaint."

"You hear, Lanpher?" asked Racey, still more nervously. "You wanna make a complaint, huh?"

Lanpher had not failed to note the nervousness of Racey's tone. Now he licked his lips again. He felt quite cheerful of a sudden. It gave him a warm and pleasant feeling to think that Racey Dawson was to a certain degree in his power. Having licked his lips several times, he rubbed his chin judicially and coughed, likewise judicially.

"Well, I dunno as I wanna make a complaint exactly," he said slowly. "But you wanna walk a chalk-line round here, Racey. You got too much to say for a fact."

"What do you think, Luke?" queried Racey. "Have I got too much to say?"

"You heard what Lanpher said," replied the cautious Luke.

"Yep, I heard all right. I just wanted to get yore opinion, because I ain't through yet—through talkin', I mean. What I was goin' to say is that I wouldn't wanna be particular about catchin' Lanpher round Moccasin Spring. If I only heard he'd been hangin' round there it would be enough."

"Meanin' you'll drill him on suspicion?"

"Meanin' I'll do just that."

"Now yo're threatenin' me again." Thus Lanpher.

"Takes you a long time to wake up, don't it?" The nervousness had vanished from Racey's voice. "Lanpher, you lousy skunk! Why don't you pull? There's a gun in that open drawer not six inches from your hand. Go after it, you hound-dog!"

Lanpher was not inordinately brave. He would go out of his way to avoid an appeal to lethal weapons. But Racey's words were more than he could stand. His hand jerked sidewise and down toward the six-shooter in the open drawer.

Bang! Shooting from the hip Racey drove an accurate bullet through the manager's right forearm. Lanpher grunted and gurgled with pain. But he made no attempt to seize his weapon with his left hand.

Luke Tweezy picked himself up from the floor where he had thrown himself a split second before the shot. Luke Tweezy's leathery face was mottled yellow with rage.

"I'll get you ten years for this!" he squalled, pointing a long arm at Racey. "You started this fight! You tried to murder him!"

"Oh, say not so," said Racey "If I'd wanted to kill him I wouldn't 'a' plugged him in the arm, would I? That wouldn't 'a' been sensible."

"You provoked this fracas!" snarled Luke, disregarding Racey's point in a true lawyer-like way "You——"

"Why no, Luke, yo're wrong, all wrong," interrupted Swing Tunstall, leaning over the window-sill at Tweezy's back. "I seen the whole thing, I did, an' I didn't see Racey do nothin' he shouldn't. I could swear to it on the stand if I had to," he added thoughtfully.

Came then Rod Rockwell, Bill Allen and Tile Stanton from the bunk-house. None made any comment on the state of affairs. But while Rod fetched water in a basin, Bill Allen cut away the sleeve of his groaning employer and made all ready.

A few minutes later Alicran Skeel entered the office.

"I thought I heard a gun," he drawled, his calm eyes embracing every one in the room.

"That man," bubbled Luke Tweezy, shaking his fist at Racey. "That man tried to kill Lanpher! I call upon you not to let him leave the premises until I can go to Farewell an' swear out a warrant for his arrest."

"That man," said Swing Tunstall, pointing a derisive finger at Luke Tweezy, "is a liar by the clock. I seen the whole thing. An' all I gotta say is that Lanpher went after his gun first."

"I ain't doubtin' yore words, Swing," Alicran said tactfully, "but they seems to be a difference of opinion sort of, an'——"

"I say that Luke Tweezy is a —— liar," reasserted Swing, "an' they ain't no difference of opinion about that."

"Well, of course, if Luke—" Alicran did not complete the sentence.

"I am a lawyer," Luke Tweezy explained hurriedly. "I ain't payin' no attention to what this man says—now."

"Or any other time," jibed Swing.

"Any of you boys see this?" Alicran asked of his three punchers.

"He tried to kill me, I tell yuh!" Lanpher gritted through his teeth. "He didn't gimme a chance."

"Any of you boys see it?" repeated Alicran, paying no attention to Lanpher.

"How could we?" asked Rod Rockwell, glancing up from the bandaging of Lanpher's arm. "We was all in the bunk-house."

"Then for the benefit of the gents who wasn't here," said Racey smoothly, "I don't mind sayin' that I told Lanpher to go after his gun, an' he did, an' I did."

"He's a liar," gibbered Lanpher. "Alicran, ain't you man enough to take care of Racey Dawson?"

Alicran nodded composedly. "I guess him an' me would come to some kind of an agreement, provided I was shore he needed takin' care of. But I ain't none shore he does. Looks like it was a even break to me, the word of you an' Luke against his an' Swing's. An' what's fairer than that, I'd like to know?"

"Alicran!" squalled Lanpher. "I'm tellin' you to——"

"Yo're all worked up, that's whatsamatter," Alicran assured him. "You don't mean more'n half yuh say. You lie down now after Rod gets through with yuh an' cool off—cool off considerable, I would. Do yuh a heap o' good. Yeah."

"An' when you get all well, Lanpher," put in Racey, "will I still be a liar like you say?"

Lanpher looked at Racey and looked away. His heated blood was cooling fast. His arm—Lord, how it hurt! He perceived that discretion was necessary to preserve his precious skin from future perforation.

"I—I guess I was a li'l hasty," he mumbled, his eyelids lowered.

"Now that's what I call right down handsome—for you," drawled Racey. "—— knows I ain't no hawg. I'm satisfied. Luke, s'pose you an' me walk out to the corral together. I got a secret for yore pearly ear."

It was obvious that Luke Tweezy was of two minds. Racey grinned to see the other's hesitation.

"What yuh scared of, Luke?" he inquired. "It ain't far to the corral, an' you can ask Alicran to come outside an' watch me while I'm talkin' to yuh."

"I ain't got no business with yuh," denied Luke Tweezy.

"Oh, yo're mistaken, a heap mistaken. Yes indeedy you got business with me. But it ain't my fault, Luke. I can't help it. Of course, if you don't wanna talk to me private-like I can reel her off in here. My thoughts was all of you an' yore feelin's, Luke, when I said the corral. I was shore you'd be happier there."

"I ain't got nothin' to hide, not a thing," declared Luke Tweezy. "But if you wanna we'll go out to the corral."

THEY went out to the corral and Racey found a seat on an empty nail-keg. Luke Tweezy sat perforce on the hard-baked ground. He hunched up his legs, clasped his hands round his shins and rested his sharp chin on his bony knees. His eyes were fixed on Racey. The latter seemed in no hurry to begin. He rolled a cigaret with irritating slowness. To force one's opponent to wait is always good strategy.

"Well," said Luke Tweezy.

"Is it?" smiled Racey. "Have it yore own way if you like. Lookit, Luke, you buy a lot of scrip now an' then, don't you?"

"Shore," nodded Luke.

"Good big discount, I'll bet."

"Why not? I ain't in business for my health. They's no law ——"

"Of course there ain't. An' yore mortgages, Luke. Do a good business in mortgages, don't yuh?"

"So-so."

"This mortgage of Old Man Dale's now, you figurin' on foreclosin' if he can't pay?"

"Whadda you know about Dale's mortgage?"

"I heard Lanpher yawpin' about it. He

talks too loud sometimes, don't he? You gonna foreclose on him, I s'pose?"

"Like that!" Luke Tweezy snapped his teeth together with a click.

"But foreclosin' takes time. You can't sell a man up the minute his mortgage is due. There's gotta be notices in the papers an' the like o' that. S'pose now he gets to borrow the money some'ers before the sale? He'll have plenty of time to look around."

"Who'd lend him money?"

"Old Salt would. He's tight, but he'd rather have Dale at Moccasin Spring than some one else, an' he'd lend Dale money rather than have him drove out."

"Shucks, he wouldn't lend him a dime. I know old Salt. Don't fret, we'll foreclose when we get ready."

"I ain't frettin'," said Racey. "You'll foreclose, huh? Aw right. I just wanted to be shore. You can go now, Luke."

Thus dismissed, Tweezy rose to his feet and glared down at Racey Dawson. His little eyes shone with spite.

"Say it," urged Racey. "You'll bust if you don't."

But Luke Tweezy did not say it. He knew better. Without a word he returned to the corral.

"They ain't gonna foreclose; that's a cinch," said Racey, when the ponies were fox-trotting toward Soogan Creek and the Bar S range five minutes later. "Luke's tellin' me they was proves they ain't."

"Shore," acquiesced Swing, "but what are they gonna do?"

"I ain't figured that out yet."

"You mean you dunno. That's the size of it."

"How'd you happen to be at that window so providential this mornin'?" Racey queried hurriedly.

"How'd you s'pose? Don't you guess I'd know they was somethin' up from the nice, kind way you said so-long to me back there at the Dales? Huh? 'Course I did. I ain't no fool. Yuh'd oughta had sense enough to take me along in the first place instead of makin' me trail yuh miles an' miles. An' where would you 'a' been if I hadn't come siftin' along, I'd like to know? Might know you'd need a witness. Them two jiggers put together could easy make you lots of trouble. What was you thinkin' of anyhow, Racey?"

"How could I tell they was both gonna be together? Besides, three of the 88 boys was over in the bunk-house. I was countin' on them."

"Over in the bunk-house, huh? A lot o' good they'd done yuh there. A lot of good. Oh, yo're bright, Racey. I'd tell a man that, I would indeed."

TO BE CONTINUED

Goomasaka makes good

by F. St. Mars

Author of "Ol' Makaw," "Citizen Yurumi," etc.

AMONG the twisted golden nets, out of the naked sun-glare, a big form lay out motionless along the warm surface of the water. A yard away, only, in the dazzling full rays the temperature stood at one hundred and forty-eight degrees. Here, where she floated in the shadow, it was but seventy-eight degrees. Such is the extreme of light and shade in the tropics of South America.

By her manner one would have guessed that she had a reputation, but not for goodness; that, in fact, she scarcely dared show her nose. This, however, was precisely the only part that she did show.

After which lucid statement it may be at once said that there were many sunken tree-roots, branches, logs, etc., in that lukewarm river, and men said that every third one was an alligator. She was an alligator therefore, a full-grown lady of that ilk, about five feet of armor-plating, keeled tail, steel-trap snout, stumpy legs, green scum and concentrated wickedness.

But more, she was in love—an unexpected enough disease to afflict so cold-blooded an accident on four legs, in very truth. But this was no great matter, it seemed, because to date she was only in love with love. And moreover, as if to make quite certain that she should remain thus, Fate had seen to it that in alligator society there should be about twenty damsels to every swain, and—well, there you are, don't you know.

Goomasaka—to call her by her little pet name—was, however, far too much in love to be put off with any "well, there you are, don't you know." She was going to find a mate, she was, and Heaven help any misguided living thing that got in her way in the process. The only immediate bar to hustling the apparently hopeless proposition along was the day. In alligatordom as elsewhere daylight is not considered propitious to the working of love-charms.

Wherefore, Goomasaka studied the blinding dazzle of the sluggish waters, the green toppling cliff of the forest edge on the far bank, towering up and up for two hundred feet in one great piled confusion of mighty tree-stems, giant lianas, creepers, curtain-moss, aerial roots, ephiphytes, lilies, orchids, begonias, parasites, fruits, nuts, branches, blossoms; with parrots turquoise, blue and red; parrakeets green and yellow; macaws blue and red, and blue and yellow and blue; humming-birds every color under the sun, and of it, and the insects every color under the sun, and of it, and of the rainbow too. And Goomasaka winked one horny green-scummed eyelid and waited for the dark. After all, if every dog may claim his day, why not every alligator her night?

Then the tail—and the tale—began to move. Two flail-like strokes of that mailed caudal appendage drove the alligator without any more warning than one small ripple across that oily stream and under

it as if she had been fired from a torpedo-tube, and the third flail-stroke—delivered quick as a cobra strikes—should have knocked into the water the thirsty spider-monkey who knew he was out of reach of the snout end, and thought he was of the tail.

The spider-monkey, who would have made a good advertisement for any anti-fat medicine, retired up-tree as if he had been thrown there by some giant hand, and Goomasaka sank backward into her own wake with a most suggestive sigh; while the flaming macaws aloft called down curses upon her armored head in a hubbub that would have roused a deaf man.

Thereafter all movement went from Goomasaka and she relapsed into a log again for some hours. Till, in fact, the "six o'clock bee"—and the same was a cicada—began to grind stones—at least, that was what it sounded like—on the roof-garden of the forest above. Some bird things, unheeding, persisted in asking—

"*What* o'clock?"

Another wished to know—

"Who are you?" and a third began calling at thirty-second intervals to some one to—

"Whip-poor-will!"

The last were nightjars, and the same presently began to wheel over the water like giant brown moths, and a big, red, howling monkey started booming up the echoes like some heathen war-drum. Then a vampire bat with a face like a plenipotentiary extraordinary from hell flitted past with no more noise than a piece of paper, and the dark curtain fell almost suddenly, as it does in the tropics, and it was night.

Then the tale—and the tail—began to move again. So did Goomasaka, across the black waters. But there were so many ghastly things moving about across the black waters, anyway—great yellow turtles, tortoises of pantomime proportions, fish of nightmare avoirdupois and appearance, overgrown lizards, and snakes—that one female or cow alligator more or less, in love or out of it, really did not make much difference. She might easily have been lost or overlooked in the general excess of horrors.

Nature, however, who has a soft place in her heart for lovers and for nobody else, had seen to this. She had given Goomasaka a voice, and not the others, though they splashed beastily. And straightway Goomasaka lifted now that voice up. 'Twas some unoiled grunt. When you had heard it, you went away. And the extraordinary thing about it was that you could not help hearing it. It was the most amazingly penetrating croak I ever knew, and the most weird serenade imaginable.

But its effect upon that silence of the forest, or rather that silence now that it was quite dark, broken only by the still steady hum of hordes of insects, like the drone that you hear in a sea-shell when you put the same to your ear—its effect was the most uncanny of all.

INSTANTLY, as if the voice of Goomasaka had started them, the face of the black waters became literally alive with the steady intermittent grunting of female alligators seeking a husband. Nor did it stop there. Swimming everywhere, searching up the tunnels of the creeks—tributaries—and half-stagnant ditches, smothered over with palms, marantas, heliconias, begonias, arums and tree-ferns, Goomasaka and the others continually grunted their strange unlovely love-call, peculiar in its subdued far-carrying quality.

But the night held no reply. Only the insects spoke, an undercurrent of sound, making the silence the more, not less, noticeable than ever. They and the occasional splash of a fish—perhaps a thousand-pounder, for all I know—or of a turtle held the dark together.

Goomasaka swung about at what appeared to be the limit of her patrol, grunting steadily, and seemed to be half-thinking of food, since Cupid would have none of her, apparently, when suddenly there burst forth a hoarse, harsh, unlovely bellow.

Goomasaka whipped round toward the sound. For a fraction of a second Goomasaka paused only to make up her clammy mind, then shot across the reaches like a thing possessed. And every female alligator within hearing did likewise—racing for a husband!

Goomasaka only was not the first to arrive because she was not the nearest. Therefore, when she did, she found a remarkable scene. A pale, weak moon crawled over the forest-roof and partially lighted it up. It was lugubrious.

In a trench-like inlet from the river, a stagnant dead place full of decay, half-choked

with mocca-mocca arum-lilies and green scum, squirmed a circle of glistening and grunting female alligators. They may have ranged from three to five feet long. In the middle of the circle, lying out along the surface, miscalled water, floated a great bull alligator, whom the jostling ladies were all admiring with upturned eyes together.

He was not lovely; they were not lovely; and he differed from them only, so far as main essentials go, in the fact that he was perhaps ten feet long. He said nothing, did nothing—just lay there soullessly, as if dead looking at them or at nothing.

Then came Goomasaka, full steam ahead, grim and deadly. Goomasaka was a beautiful specimen of her sex, though not a beauty. She must have been over five feet long. And Goomasaka snapped, like lightning, right and left, and lo, as if she had broken some awful evil spell and let out all the furies on cinders, the whole scene dissolved amid throes into chaos.

What transpired exactly perhaps the bull 'gator may have known. To us, in the quarter-light and the shadows, it looked like the raving of insensate devils—an inextricable whirl of foam, flying water, lashing tails, clashing jaws, grinding plated bodies, hissing compared to which the hissing of a snake, even, is sweet and mild. It is a frenzy-seizure almost, peculiar to but not altogether uncommon in alligatordom and crocodile society.

Even quite young alligators *en masse* are subject to these berserk attacks, a sort of crowd fury, which seizes upon them like a raging fire and consumes like a raging fire, too, for the matter of that, for the damage done is often terrible.

Out of the living boiling volcano of strife was saved, by Fate, Goomasaka—whole, if not unscathed. Her jaws were red truly, but not with her own blood, and for the rest, she had given more than she took. She had dived and come up close to the bull. For ten seconds he looked at her, or he did not look. Upon my soul, one can not tell what these cold-blooded nightmares see or think. Then he winked one horny eyelid and the two sank out of sight together.

So far, so good. That was the end of them and their April madness, one might have thought, and good riddance to unholy horrors. But it was not the end. It was only the interval.

THE place was damp, the air was dank, the ground was damp and dank, and the thick waxy foliage and the fleshy fungi, the fantastic-shaped mosses and the smothering lichens were damper and danker still, and dripping. Shaded even at noonday with a deeper than religious gloom, fateful in its cathedral silence, that was the only thing religious about it. Otherwise it was no place for Christians, and the heat was most unholy.

One was just beginning to think that if anything lived therein it must be demons to match the heat, when Goomasaka came up. Through brightest green scum she came up, and with the leaf of a giant water-lily plastered over one eye and waterweed obscuring the other, she did not look likely to win that "golden apple." But some people say that a true woman's place is in her home, working, not gadding about at dances, looking beautiful.

Well, Goomasaka was all that, and one better. She was building her home, or her nursery rather, in a sun-bar. Her ugly, long snout was as full of the most beastly mess of decaying vegetation as ever it could hold, and there was a heap of the same to prove it.

Goomasaka deposited her load upon the heap. It was hers, all her very own, and she had made it. This was her last load. She had, as it were, "put the roof on," torn, mouthful by mouthful from vile, scum-choked sloughs, and the whole affair was beginning to rot. It was already hotter inside to the touch than even the outside stewing air.

Then Goomasaka retired stealthily, sinking back into the coffee-colored water, and for about three weeks was no more seen—but she was there, or thereabouts, and came stealthily to that secret place o' nights.

Oh, yes! And, by the by, there was no sign of the ten-foot monster hubby; neither then nor thereafter was there so much as a hiss of him. But what can you expect of a fellow so ludicrously lionized and absolutely run after as he? Perhaps he had long since bigamously gone off with some other scaly charmer or charmers. Th' blackguard!

And that was in May.

Three weeks passed and except for the fact that a cavy—which is the father of the Guinea-pig—went to drink in the creek beside that rotting heap of vegetation and

did not come back, and that a rat took a swim across that same creek, and never got to the other side; except for these things nothing particular happened in that place to show whether Goomasaka remained in that lugubrious place or not, or if she were dead or alive.

Then, upon a day when all the world seemed to have gone to sleep or expired via heat, the snub, scaly nose of our heroine ceased to be a piece of floating wood any longer and came up out of those unspeakable waters to her rubbish-heap. Nay, she did more. Gracious, yes. The horrible thing seemed to have gone what the new *elite* describe as "potty." She tore her nursery to pieces. It had caked hard outside, and she broke it open; she crawled inside—inside that natural steaming oven, mind. And, my! How hot it was. If it had not been so wet, it would have caught fire from spontaneous combustion. Nothing but a cold-blooded reptile could have stuck to it.

Finally Goomasaka crawled out again, covered all up as before, and dragged herself back to the water. Yea, "covered all up as before," but with this difference. That heap of heated herbage had been empty when Goomasaka visited it; not after. After, it contained eggs, eggs of the alligator, thirty exactly, to be precise, white but dirty like hens' eggs, mainly rough shelled and granulated, weighing each roughly about three ounces—eggs, in short, of Goomasaka.

Thereafter two and a half months dragged sweltering, stifling by. But this time there was no need to inquire for Madame Goomasaka. She was there on hand at her post. Not on view exactly. I defy you to have found her with any amount of searching, but she would have found you, if you had approached her rubbish-heap nursery at any time of darkest night or brightest day, without any searching whatever. First a grunt and then a hiss and then a charge.

This also others, who were not humans, discovered, for there is always somebody watching in the wild. One day it was an enormous lizard, very long and whippy, a regular giant-killer of a lizard, who reckoned himself official collector of alligators' eggs. He got as far as making a hole in the crust of the heap, and then Goomasaka, propelled as if by motors—and with much the same noise—got as far as him. Followed a crack like a pistol-shot in the hot-house silence, which was the lizard's tail across Goomasaka's back, then a scurry, then a rush, then a splash, then silence again. But the lizard had left his tail!

Upon another day it was a mongoose, that little, lithe, weasely cat, or catty weasel, just there from nowhere, silent as a big bristle-brush, digging away gaily. He, though he was taken completely unawares, jumped clean over Goomasaka's plated back as she hurtled by underneath. Only—he forgot the tail! Quick and quicker to move, sharp and sharper to dare—he forgot the tail. He never had the chance to remember it after. He was dead.

Upon yet a third day it was a yellow-tailed snake. But that snake was an amateur. It never got any farther than the outer caked wall of the nursery. It could not dig. Nor could it jump, but went up a tree instead, with Goomasaka's jaws snapping at its yellow end. Then, after two and a half months of weary waiting, watching, perhaps—for even an alligator may have feelings, it seems—longing, the wonderful thing happened.

That precious heap by that time, thanks to the natural dampness of the place, the fierce rains and fiercer sun, had become pretty well "hard bake," and how the nightmare brood when it hatched was going to break its way out before it stifled or stewed to death seemed a mystery the inscrutable Goomasaka alone could solve, which is just what she did.

Whether she could hear the faintest of faint grunting squeaks through the oven-walls or whether she could count the days or whether she had some other means of divining the truth by her own devil's devising—who can tell? The fact remains, however, that upon a day she came up and sprawled herself all over the nest and refused to go off, even at the invitation of a lithe, lean, painted young jaguar, for hours. Then she finally got off and in a hurry began to tear through the crust as only those terrible teeth could tear through things till she came unto those precious eggs.

The first one she touched she rolled out. It was yellow, which means addled. She rolled it back and gently with her snout rolled out another. It was pinkish and quite smooth. Moreover, there was no doubt here. The pip-squeak within spoke in a tiny voice through his nose and that

nose poked out through an aperture, where apparently it had jammed and its owner could get no farther.

WITH the utmost care Goomasaka bored one of her front teeth into the shell of this egg till it cracked, and instantly lo—as it were a conjuring trick—out shot a perfect young alligator, like his mother to a T, except as to his shorter snout, bulging baby eyes and his black-banded uniform.

But that was not the wonder. It was his fully-formed alligator character functioning, his pugnacious, precocious, complete adequateness that made one gasp. He was all there. He was it—the living 'gator, in a breath. He dived into the water, dashed round and about, the remains of his shell hanging on behind, snapped like a flash of light at a water-beetle and was still floating, complete, in full working-order, delivered in one breath "ready for the road," so to speak.

To complete the miracle it may be mentioned that though he was only some seven inches long, he grew another whole inch in the next few hours. And if anything is wanted after that, it may be mentioned that for twenty-five hours before Goomasaka had liberated him he had remained in that half-pipped condition within the egg, hopeless, helpless and apparently lifeless, and would have died thus without properly living, if his mother had not come and reprieved him. Thus your 'gatorling.

Three 'gatorlings who had lustily pipped for themselves—they will sometimes, but it is likely to be a long and a dangerous job—now scuttled down to the water and dived in; and their brother met 'em with snaps as they arrived.

Goomasaka then rolled out two yellow eggs which never would be any use. Then three pinkish ones—all with convoluted shells these, for they vary—which, however, were not pipped and from which no absurd squeaking grunts emanated, and these she rolled back again as one who handles pearls of priceless worth.

And thus, egg by egg, that weird armored reptile that seemed to have been a left-over from the dim past sorted over carefully the whole of her clutch; liberating here where a pipped shell and frantic nasal expostulations from within showed that her scientific surgical attentions were needed; rolling back there where the shell showed the egg not yet ready, guiding elsewhere where 'gatorlings had broken out.

Then finally she covered all the unhatched eggs over again as they had been and returned to the water to be promptly surrounded by a little fleet of fourteen 'gatorlings, and then almost as promptly to hurl herself—scattering said 'gatorlings much to their little horror right and left—to the other side of the creek with a swirl that lapped the banks. Her jaws could be heard distinctly snapping like the clash of steel traps, once, twice, and again; a terrific commotion followed; water, débris and leaves flew into the air together.

Goomasaka's blood-freezing hiss filled the forest silence; another hiss followed, long-drawn and sibilant. There was a glimpse of slashing jaws and crashing plated tail and writhing, shining green coils, and all sank under the water together. The surface boiled and was still again, and that was all.

Some snake, a big yellow tail, in fact—and Goomasaka, as we know, "owed him one"—whether attracted by the prospect of a free lunch of newly hatched 'gatorling or whether by chance, had come sliding down to the creek while Goomasaka was busy with her back turned. His glinting coils had flashed to her quick reptilian eyes as she moved round, and—well, she badly needed a meal without having to leave the nest far. That was that.

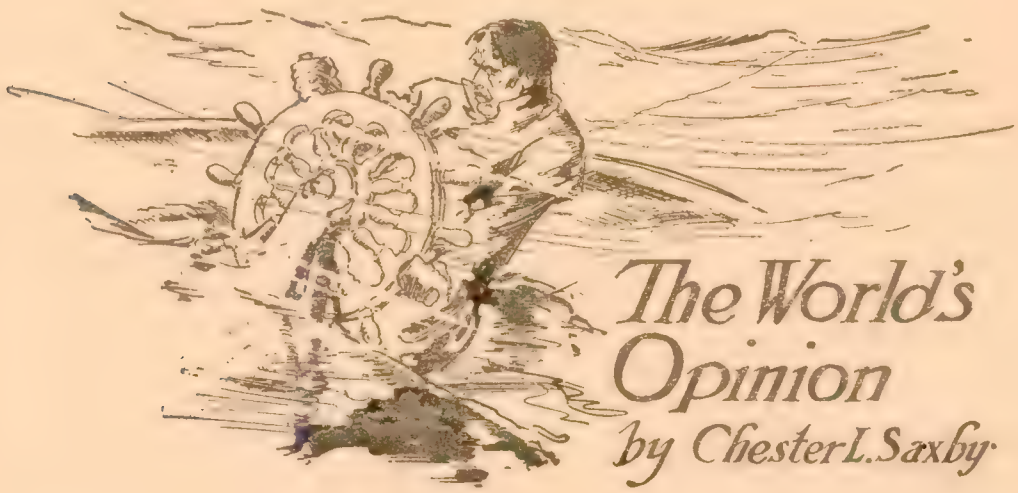
NEXT day Goomasaka returned to her bake-oven of a nursery and the day after, listening for the pip-squeak voices, uncovering the eggs and cracking the egg-shells quickly, till at last there were only the addled yellow eggs left—five in number.

Then Goomasaka covered up her nest no more. She swam away, surrounded by her fleet of twenty 'gatorlings, away to lie out in the hot shallows, to chase fish at the foot of the waterfalls, to gobble up ducks as they swam the pools and to be a thorn in the sides of the snakes all up and down the still mysterious, stifling reaches.

But only twenty 'gatorlings you ask? Where were the rest? Oh, they had become too complete and precocious and had swum away on their own tiny hook, to

live, or more probably to die, as Fate chose.

Those, however, that were left sufficed for all maternal wants, and such was Goomasaka's love for them, or theirs for her, that some even remained with dear mamma, or nearabouts, after she had hatched out her next brood in the following year. Some "maw," I guess.



Author of "El Capitán Arrrnie," "Not for a Thousand"

ARNIE SONDHEIM, seventeen years before the mast and in all that time accumulating neither more nor less than any other able seaman, to wit: a sea-chest indifferently stowed, an experience and observation of considerable extent and a hardihood almost inconceivable to a landsman, looked upon the forlorn little vessel, dry-rotted above deck and fire-gutted below hatches, that fortune had managed to thrust upon him all in a moment; and as he looked, he laughed—not because he wanted to but because there seemed nothing else to express his emotion.

He told himself that he accepted along with those other immaterial acquisitions of his seafaring life that culminative gift of the grim ocean to its devotees—fatalism. It had been in the back of his head for some time; now he reasoned that as a religion it had proved itself.

He could not forget—since he never forgot anything—that there had been a time when to be captain of a mud-scow must have filled him with pride and satisfaction. Now in his saving of the *Jessica* he had doomed himself—if he had not already done that sufficiently.

Lelona laughed and called the vessel a lugger, Lelona whose doe-eyed, Castilian vividness of beauty sent him to sea to fight wind and water and fire, Lelona who shared his compact and marked the value of life.

With the *Jessica* he had meant to end this aimless drifting and be done with *Jessica* and winds and tide. And Lelona laughed and called the vessel a lugger. Aye, he did not doubt it might be his—this lugger. He did not doubt the *Ancient Mariner* could claim absolute possession of the albatross that hung at his neck. Japes said the ship was his; indeed, he did not see how he could get rid of it.

To the diminutive Yankee cook he remarked stoically:

"Maybe we could sell the timbers in her and pay off the crew."

Whereupon Japes narrowed his shrewd Yankee eyes, pursed his monkey lips and, swallowing hard, suggested—

"W'y not repair 'er an' ship the crew on ag'in?"

In his plucky manner he added:

"Ain't I got two thousan' dollars? Let's we be pardners."

Arnie stared into the offing and said nothing just then. When he had come from seeing Lelona a second time—having been impelled thither past anything he could do

—he wore a stern but more determined air and answered Japes—

"I'm willing."

He was still fatalistic; he hoped for little. But Lelona, seated dreamily before the clerk's desk in the dull and all but vacant hotel, thrust out her soft clinging fingers in the old way and told him that if he cared for her enough—*carrambal* what was there he could not do? He had a little vessel—ah, then there would be a bigger one "nex' tam'," and a big vessel—*si*, it was all very possible in that case.

Arnie was ashamed to confess to her how he had come by this one, how little Frisco ship-owners trusted him, how slight were the chances.

Instead, he said to Japes, "I'm willing," and the mite of a cook—whose secret and burning ambition was for a bit of a cottage on the Maine coast and a smart little fishing-trawler all his own—grinned and bobbed off to establish financial basis for making the poor, dilapidated *Jessica* fit for sea.

It was accomplished—this repairing and refitting and storing—in some manner, by very cheap labor and such materials as the prideless, unequipped Chilean town of San Carlos possessed.

A mate even was found; a young fellow, no more than twenty-five years old, decent-appearing in face if not in clothes, a refined type by some whim of fickle Fortune and so quite incongruous aboard the *Jessica*. He had surprizingly good manners and apparently an equally good education; but he seemed glad of the berth—in his rather abashed, uncertain way. His name was Charley Grant.

Japes, never otherwise than cheerful, grew radiantly optimistic and strutted the decks like a game-cock by reason of his part in bringing matters to their present situation. He forgot the cottage on the Maine coast and went about patting the various protuberant parts of the *Jessica* as if she were the very trawler of which he dreamed.

When the bowing and scraping port-official, full of admiration for the honesty that had made known the crime of the *Jessica's* former owner, proffered them a cargo of hides for the run northward, Japes' pride became a warming glow.

Arnie muttered, "Hides," but ventured no protest. After all, there was no smell he had not smelled, and smells would not break one—or make one, either.

He stuffed bills and clearance-papers into his pocket and climbed the hill to the hotel once more. He thought vaguely—everything was very vague; expectations, creeds, purpose—that he was bidding farewell to more than he could rightly grasp, more than he would ever know.

But Lelona, suddenly seized with a return of her quondam abandon, sent him away with a mad, blissful moment to keep his heart alive; the wind whined in the rigging; the greasy-haired official added to his god-speed a dirty sealed envelope, which Arnie stuffed away unread, and the *Jessica* rounded her buoy and put her bows seaward —a slight, miserable hope in a vast waste of doubt.

THEREAFTER, almost before they had got fairly upon the course, the wind veered, freshened and came down out of the northwest with a fury unappeasable. Into the teeth of it the *Jessica* beat on a taut bow-line for six and thirty hours, then finding herself imperiled by so much bravery and her sails in danger of blowing out of the gaskets, about she came and scampered fearfully southward.

Arnie saw the mettle of his new-found mate when this time came. Charley Grant owned a physique no stouter—or scarcely stouter—than the little cook's; but he fought the storm with a rather sublime strength that was not in his body. Arnie watched him, white-lipped at the wheel, wondered what made his hands tremble on the spokes, perceived with dismay how his gaze roved to the huge seas piling up behind them, and tried to comprehend why this pasty-faced youth did not cover his eyes and have done with it.

But he did not; he gripped the horribly convulsive helm, scanned the mounting combers hanging above the *Jessica's* counter, glanced wildly at the deepening troughs that hour by hour grew into churning valleys which the wind did not reach, gaped aloft toward the source of utterly unearthly sound, bit his lip as he sucked it into his mouth, could not for the life of him keep his teeth from chattering, streamed with sweat never produced by physical straining, observed Arnie looking steadily at him—and managed a high-pitched, abashed laugh.

He was the queerest sort Arnie had ever known; there was no explanation of him.

He winced and cringed—and kept his post. He lost every ounce of blood out of his face from very fright—and kept his post. He opened his mouth and babbled like a scared child—but he kept his post.

And when he was relieved at last, he wilted in his tracks, crumpled into a still heap under the very feet of the other men and, when they had dragged him to the companion and down the ladder to his berth, wriggled to his elbow—out of a profound swoon, it appeared—and apologized most humbly. In two hours he was on deck again, quaking in his dread and yet offering to go aloft to snug a topsail newly blown out.

In the din of the tempest and the swirl of pursuing green crests the world assumed most certainly a malignant and terrible aspect. Over the formless deep spread a devouring chaos full of seven-tongued fury.

The driven ship moaned in all her timbers, shouted hoarsely at galley door and wheel-house and where the cuddy roof butted out of the after-deck, shrieked her agony of helplessness from every stay and brace, wailed and sobbed amidst her top hamper; and fast upon her flying heels, swooping at her with white-plumed claws, fetching up under her and dragging her back, snarling, baying primordially, gnashing its teeth, driveling insanely, came the whole body of the sea with great smoothly timed pounces and a blinding mass of spray.

OUT of a firmament, toward which quaking souls turn their eyes, descended no slightest ray of hope; a smoky cast it had, and all its immeasurably deep wind-caves were massed together, obliterated, swept by a thin black scud.

Wretched, hunted and haunted, the *Jessica* glistened in the weird light from stem to gudgeon, from wash-streak to trucks. At the summit of a forty-foot comber set like a wall to stop her, she shook herself and ran out the burden of water through her scupper-holes, only to freight herself anew with the next dizzy descent into greenish-black depths.

Topgallantmasts bent forward so that the trunks of the lower masts against which the men crouched for protection from the biting spume thrummed to a ghostly pitch. The watch sought vainly to find the lee of any and all uprearing structure; there was no lee; the savage wind struck from every quarter and raked them mercilessly.

Bedraggled, dull of eye, they capitulated at length, gripped whatever came into their hands and let the demoniacal seas tumble over them. And the forty-foot combers on the fourth day were fifty feet tall and full of a lurid glimmer all their own.

That night the mainroyalmast snapped off.

Arnie, clad only in his light-weight sailor's garb, occupied a position amidships and, feet wide-planted, body stooping to meet the gale, stared aft through smarting eyes and gaged the velocity of the wind, making it fifty knots.

The night came down, blotted out the long vigil of twilight, blotted out wraith-like scud and lustrous emerald hills, blotted out man from the sight of man. Still Arnie stood, only now he listened, substituting his hearing for his sight.

The thunder of a sea racing faster—faster than the blundering, yawing *Jessica*, broke with a nerve-shattering roar upon his ears and would have spun him as lightly as a chip out upon the yeasty turmoil had he not gripped a spike driven into the mast and heaved himself off his feet; even then he was deluged.

And almost with the expiring of those bruising waters boomed yet another crashing wave.

Down upon all fours he dropped and splashed and wallowed and crawled aft. His recklessness held the next sea in admiring abeyance; his head thrust in at the wheel-house door. He shouted a greeting to the two men there.

"Got to come about!" he yelled at them. "Can't make it! Sea's too high!"

One of them nodded; his gnarled fingers and his knees, too, held the wheel from spinning and hurling them all into eternity. He had nothing to say. The other turned his head and cried out a protest. This was the man Grant.

Arnie scrutinized him. In the dim light flung upward from the binnacle Grant's face showed ashen and given over to a nervousness that set it a-quiver in every muscle. He saw Arnie's faded, stubborn grin and tried to match it.

"My ——, sir, we can't do that!" he blurted huskily. "We can't—can't!"

"What's to stop us?" Arnie questioned blankly. "'Fraid, are you?"

The word acted upon Grant in an altogether different manner than he had

expected. Instead of inflaming him with livid anger, it simply extracted from him every whit of muscular tension and rendered him deadly calm, gave him the look of a Death's head. In that moment Arnie perceived a wonderful thing; the power of human speech to break through the terrorizing effect of the destroying storm. For clear as crystal in Grant's countenance showed all at once a quieting, intolerable shame.

He did not speak. Arnie buttressed himself and grasped the mate's thin shoulder. Their glances met; Arnie felt strangely disturbed and began to bluster:

"Take your choice. A few more like them'll put her under. She's a goner if she runs; maybe she's a goner if she heaves to. What do you say?"

"All right," came simply from Grant. "I'll go set the jib."

And he must actually have gone had not Arnie thrust him back, studying him the while.

THUS with the first haggard streak of dawn that barely dissipated the night's darkness the *Jessica*, having somehow by the grace of Providence worn round in the midst of a hellish sea, stood bows on to the increasing tempest—for, hard as the wind had blown, it blew even harder now, blew hard walls of chiller and chiller air against which none dared venture out except one Captain Sondheim, who periodically renounced the banging, rolling cabin for the wet, plunging deck whereon with a whimsical grin of the tested cynic he fought for his life, wrestled the mad mast and was flung utterly without mercy against the bulwarks and the cabin siding.

Charley Grant had lashed himself by his legs twined around the legs of the fixed table, and when Arnie tumbled down the ladder, bedraggled and bruised, he cried to him:

"Anything I can do, sir? Do you want some help on deck?"

"I'll be trying for the galley," Arnie said. "Japes is in there."

"You can't make it; you'd be swept off. You shouldn't try it."

"Can't?" echoed Arnie. "What'll you bet me I can't?" And he laughed.

"You've got guts." Grant's tone spelled sincere admiration. "You're big."

"Go on!" the eulogy was repudiated. "What's the difference where you take it and how it comes? I'd as leaves turn 'er beam-on and let 'er go."

"No, you wouldn't," Grant flung out.

The calm was on his face again, that odd something that struggled with the fear and momentarily defeated it.

"You don't know what it is to give up. I do, but you don't. You'd fight after you were beaten."

"That's funny." Arnie braced himself and considered this. "By ——, I do hate to quit! No sense in it, either. We're stubborn animals, I guess."

He had never in his recollection talked this way with anybody, and it made him feel silly, but somehow this queer fellow brought it out, made him want to tell his mind.

And Grant ventured deliberately:

"That's not it. Animals don't fight after they're done in."

The ship spun on a crest and dived for the trough, flinging his head back sharply against the bulkhead. He swallowed the pain.

"It's self-respect," he jerked out. "You'd give all you've got even if you got no return for it."

"Come again." Arnie wagged his head. "I want to get paid for what I do. I don't work for nothing. But seventeen years without finding it—that's enough."

The noise of rushing, grinding water immersed them. The *Jessica* groaned.

"What are you after?" Grant asked, adding, "Listen to her pound—whew!"

Arnie watched the lamp soar in its arc.

"I don't know. Nobody knows."

"There's money," suggested Grant. He was merely stared at. "There's being captain—that's something."

Arnie muttered an oath. "There's having it easy."

"Having it easy—that's like dying. I've got to be on the jump."

"But not this way." The mate's hand went out in a semi-circle. "The very air stinks down here; it's like living in a tenement. You're no hog, sir."

"I don't know. I've lived in rotten fo'csles all my life. I didn't much care about it." Suddenly he broke out, "What's it all about, I'd like to know?"

"I've wondered, too."

A terrific sea shipped aboard with the sound of Gabriel's trumpet. Grant lost color and gasped.

"Days when I was down and out, beachcombing—" whereat he flushed and went livid again—"I've tried to forget about it. I couldn't, no matter what I did. It's respectability that grips a man." His eyes showed an inward fire battling for life. "It's what the world thinks of you."

As Arnie heard him he recalled him crouching at the wheel like a whipped cur, afraid of every sea, wincing before the hoarse, supernatural clamor aloft, white-lipped with dread in the contemplation of bringing the vessel about. He thought this man a strange one to speak as he did; and then, he thought, not so strange. A beachcomber, eh? Down and out! And here he was gambling for his precious life.

"Don't go worrying what the world thinks of you." Arnie shrugged. "It don't think anything, most likely. I go by what I think myself, and that's all."

"Same thing," Grant nodded. "Self-respect, I suppose you'd call it." His hands on the table-top trembled; he looked very slight and weak and pathetic. "You've got no use for yourself the way you're going—and you can't quit dreaming——"

"Dreaming." The word tumbled unbidden out of Arnie's lips. "Seems like there's something your stomach wants, but when you eat you don't feel any better. A lot of music I dream about most. If only I could hear that music I wouldn't be so lonesome."

He stared at the opposite bulkhead, seeing there the ardent face of Lelona. But he said nothing of this, and presently he got to his feet to fight off the thrumming of his pulses, the ache beneath his ribs.

"You talk funny talk," he grinned.

Grant seemed not to hear him. His head was sunk in his arms on the table where his forehead beat with the flinging of the vessel. He was sobbing like a girl. Arnie watched him, a little stupidly, and, spinning round, was up the ladder again.

He had been stirred; how deeply, he hated to acknowledge. What would the men think if they had bent an ear to what he had just admitted? Woman's talk—that was the name for it. But that view of it stumped him also, because Lelona must have laughed outright if he had so unburdened himself to her. He gave it up.

The air was growing steadily blacker—and more raw. He looked to see if the wind had shifted, shading his eyes with his whole arm to keep the salt spray from blinding him. If the wind veered they were done for; a cross sea they would never survive; it would pound the *Jessica* to pieces in a few hours, open up weak seams of which she was full, and down to Davy Jones' locker with them.

No, the gale held in the same quarter, but the sky was black. Wintry weather. Cape weather. Fine particles less moist and more stinging to the flesh whipped his cheeks. It was snowing.

And all at once he was thinking of Captain Miant and the *Snowbird* and the thick pall of snow. Somewhere Captain Miant had reached the coast, he knew now; but at what cost? And that true sailor's gaunt distress he vividly remembered.

"Save the ship!" was the captain's one supreme prayer. "Save the ship!"

Save the ship! And he, Arnie Sondheim, deposed second mate, had saved it. He felt warm with the flooding burst of unreasonable satisfaction the memory inspired—unreasonable—maybe not—if Grant's funny idea had any foundation. Grant would have it that he had saved the brig for the satisfaction of the world's opinion of him.

He weighed this, half-ashamed of giving it a second thought. All to no use: he made nothing of it. He gave not a —— what the world thought, what Miant thought, what all the ship-owners in Frisco thought. Grant was making a fool out of him.

THE immediate necessity was to reach Japes, isolated in his galley and in constant danger of being swept by the board—he and his blessed galley with him and all his pots and pans and his flowered vest. He began to make forward stealthily.

But a huge comber saw him. There was the devil's glee in its myriad eyes, the voice of dead souls wailing in its voice. It saw him; it lifted up—up—up, hung imminent—and swooped downward.

Alertly he responded; up went his hands to grasp a brace and swing himself off the deck out of harm's way; but he did not touch it. Instead his mild eyes looked straight into that engine of destruction that had no mind of its own, that was far more impotent than he. If he could not fight this senseless, blundering mass without being a monkey, then he must be no better than a monkey, and there was an end of it.

While he waited, the *Jessica*, having slid down—down—down to the very abyss, began to clamber up that steep wall. Her nose was buried an instant, then she flung free and mounted step by step. The wave descended with the sound of an explosion; but the *Jessica* was high up its side and received only what she could stand. Shuddering violently, she paused, swung two points and arrived at temporary safety.

Arnie studied the soapy stuff battering at his legs. A joyous glow took the chill out of his flesh. He kept on.

At the galley door he stood panting; his feet slid in opposite directions; his grip on the knob wrenched his arms cruelly. A lull intervened, and from within a faint sound of disordered singing came beating like wounded wings:

> "'I'm a-gulpin' sour fog,
> Swiggin' whale-oil fer grog,
> But I might 'a' done wuss,'
> Hollered Jonah——"

Arnie banged on the rickety panel and upset the little cook by his precipitate entrance. As he swung the door to behind him a body of spray smashed on it.

"Howdy! Ye're a welcome caller," Japes bawled. He picked himself up and some bully beef that had gone down with him. "I was 'lowin' tuh fetch some grub aft. It's two jorums hez been gobbled by the sea; this 'ere's the third. Bad walkin' on deck I find it, sir."

The box of a galley shook in the blast and bade fair to pick up its heels and make off, but Japes seemed oblivious of this possibility.

"You can't stay here," Arnie told him. "There's no living above hatches."

"Sho! Do tell! Ain't there livin' allwheres, sir? I was whalin' once——"

"You've got me beat," Arnie grinned. "Guts to you, Japes, is what."

Hardly had he said it when he recollected the mate had said the same of him but a moment ago. That was queer. He watched the effect upon the little cook. A crimson wave dyed the thin face; the sparkling eyes became in a trice flustered. A wisp of happiness—that's what the compliment did.

Japes giggled as at a joke, articulated "Sho!" and "How come?" and told him to "go 'long." But there was no questioning the breath of satisfaction. Arnie stowed this observation away with the echo ringing in his ears, "It's what the world thinks of you."

He repeated his command that Japes leave the quaking galley. Japes, however, stubbornly refused to do this.

"Abandonin' ship, sir?" he queried.

When Arnie shook his head:

"I ain't fer abandonin', neither. I cal'late tuh hev some pride. I'll stay, thank 'e."

"What's pride got to do with it?" Arnie asked him. "You're no good here."

"Mebbe so—mebbe so. I'm a mind tuh be on duty anywys. It's proper."

"Proper, is it? The *Jessica* don't sail man-o'-war style. Who's to hold it against you to save your hide? We're owners, the two of us; nobody to say different. Your money gone to glory along of mine—Proper!"

Japes winced at mention of the money. Just the same he would not stir.

"I'd a mite ruther do ez is proper, sir," he said. "Savin' of my hide ain't all there is; the Book says ez losin' yer tarnation life is findin' it—not thet I'm by way o' dyin', no siree. The *Jessica's* a proper ship. By the same token I'm a proper cook—an' yer a proper skipper, sir, ez proper a skipper ez er ever I know, which I'd lay to an' no mistake," and his voice strode big with sincerity. He added, "Yuh'd not hev me tote my vest out in the wet, neither, would yuh now?"

"No," said Arnie. "I wouldn't have that. I'll look in on you again."

And out he went, feeling vaguely moved, and faced the storm as he made hand over hand for the forecastle scuttle. Dripping wet from top to toe, he tumbled down among the crew confined in that evil hole, some slung in hammocks, some knocking about in berths, the lamp careening wildly and making more sinister the hopeless scene.

Confusion, discomfort, filth, sour haze of rank tobacco-smoke, straining of timbers, the groans of the mast, nerve-sapping hammer-strokes of the sea, the sickening plunge of the bows—nothing here certainly to make life worth the living, not a single warm meal in three days, only the stupefying warmth of the occasional tot of grog and a pot of coffee now and then, over which Japes had scalded his hands and arms and legs.

And out of this sodden, putrified retreat one would go forth ever and again to risk his life reaching the helm and holding it.

Yet with the sight of Arnie standing there the unhappy faces broadened mightily; one or two shuffled unsteadily to their feet; a voice rose—

"'Ere we be, sir, an' 'spectin' we'll be 'avin' the last on it arter a bit."

"That's the talk," Arnie agreed. "No giving up now, boys!"

One of them laughed hoarsely.

"We'd be ready tuh give up w'en you be. Say the word. Ef she won't be makin' et, yuh won't mind tellin' us, will yuh?"

"Not a bit. She's got 'er spunk up. Rides handsomely. Are you dry?"

"Them for'ard berths leaks consid'able. 'Ammicks don't leak a-tall. Mought ye say w'ereabouts we lay, sir? It'll give us some 'at tuh argy."

"Off the Horn," Arnie responded without hesitation.

He had taken no reading since the first day and needed none. Waking or sleeping, something within him registered the make or the drifting. Lowering skies, confining tempests of waters had no influence over this uncanny feeling for distance and position. He knew their latitude was fifty-seven degrees and a few minutes; in some manner he knew it.

That meant that they were being blown southward at an alarming rate and into terrible seas. A general exclamation went up mingled with violent cursing. He stood braced against the ladder and showed a face as ironic and weary as theirs.

"Well," mouthed some one, "don't go blattin' ut the cap'n like 'e done ut."

"By ——, no! Leave it tuh 'im, 'n' ye'll not go fur wrong."

"Y'ain't meanin' tuh say y'ain't trustin' 'im, is yuh? I'll l'arn yuh——"

"Easy there, Ed! We be all of a mind on thet score. Beggin' yer pardon, sir, this here's the first time ever I laid store by a capting. We ain't nowise worried. Fire er wind, hey, maties? All one tuh him."

"Hark tuh George now, cap'n; 'e's tellin' yuh somethin' new."

This was given with a laugh that the whole ship's company joined. They plainly expected Arnie to join, too, but he only stared at them. And as he stared, his eyes began to blink and an unwarned color to rise from the back of his neck. It sobered them, that stare; they stared back and then tried to look elsewhere.

"Reckon yer plumb tuckered," ventured one near by. "'Ere's my tot, sir."

"No, thanks," said Arnie.

He found himself not nearly so tired as he had been. He was buoyed up by an emotion of unreality. Crude men speaking with crude voices lifted him bodily out of his disgust and fatigue. He had known whisky to do this, when there was plenty of it and he could overcome the first bitter taste of it. Here there was no first bitterness. It was more like a moment with Lelona.

All at once the suspicion came to him that they were guying him. Otherwise why should they talk this way? In seventeen years he had never heard a ship's company praise an officer. Indeed, it was not logical; they had nothing to gain by it.

"That's the way; keep your spirits up," he laughed out.

The din of banging seas and the other frenzied voices of the storm beat back his words. The wind had a rasping edge—like that of a slack violin-string. He was angry with himself rather than with them for this sudden emotion of blessed unreality.

"We aim to," he was answered. "Sailin' back'ards is sure funny."

"But I'll tell you this," Arnie rushed on as he made to ascend the ladder. "It don't matter who's captain now. She'll either keep her head up or she won't."

The sailor who had offered his drink grinned and squinted into the tin cup.

"Reckon so, sir. Jes' the same we likes good comp'ny tuh go swimmin' in. 'Ere's lookin' at ye, sir! An' many of 'em!"

MORE and more lost, finding himself for the first time unable to cope with a question that other men found easy to understand, Arnie swung on to the deck again. And in an instant he realized how searching had grown the wind, how charged with cold. A mid-Winter sea they had entered; the snow had ceased to fall, but the spray upon the life-line was freezing to his touch. A wild fling of the bows to larboard hurled a staggering sea over him; he regained his feet, gasping. Growing every minute colder, and the night setting in. And should the wind change——

But the wind would not change. It would blow and blow, and the decks would crack soon, if they had not already done so, and down upon the heaps and heaps of hides in the hold would drip—drip—drip

the salt water. If the *Jessica* did not go soon the hides must before long begin to sicken them. He had seen men die of poison-fumes from the cargo. If it came to that he should have to toss the hides overboard. Yes, he was a fatalist—time he was admitting it.

The *Jessica* faltered, heeled—and righted herself; but quick as thought half a fathom of icy sea-stuff shipped aboard and struck him down, swam over him and left him full of a cold anger. He got up and fronted the vicious wind; he stood in the fairway of it, dared it to strike again. While he waited it did not strike.

Steel-gray grew his eyes then, intense with purpose his mouth. He would fight this sneaking sackful of wind to the last breath; he would save the ship as he had saved her before, as he had saved the *Snowbird*. He had vowed to bring her in, and so he would.

Be —— to fortune and men and their sniveling, sneering suspicion of him—those pot-bellied landlubbers that owned vessels and wagged knowing heads at him! He was through with playing the game for the favor it might win him; tired of forgetting his own part.

At the Horn, were they? Well then, beat back, beat back!

The poor fool of a mate he had taken on was dead wrong in his talk of the world's opinion. If anybody was right it was Lelona, and of all the things life lured him with, only money counted. It was a hard aspect for him, to whom money had been as dust in his pocket.

But money and nothing else Lelona had meant when she told him it must be a bigger ship. Money meant Lelona, and Lelona meant happiness. He knew he would not get it, for he was a fatalist, and whatever he hungered for most, that above all would be denied him. But he would fight.

He squashed into the scuttle and bawled: "All hands to make sail!" And while they gazed upward, hushed, incredulous, "Run out the jib-boom! Double-reef the foretops'l! Look alive! Jump!"

Slamming the scuttle, he went for the mate.

Cold and colder bit the air; in guns the wind tore at the chip of a bark. In deepening twilight the crew stumbled up and shivered and stared. What a joke! Yet they discovered Arnie battling his way to the bows, and on hands and knees they followed him. Insane or not, he was to be trusted. They did not wait to ask.

But they could not manage to run out the boom; so they tacked the forestaysail and got it to showing. While they watched for it to blow out, they struggled aloft with lines about their waists to shake out what they could of the topsail. The *Jessica* seemed ready to burst asunder; death loomed in this madness.

Swollen, smoldering, livid water; clouds compounded of water and wind on a higher stratum; the overcharged vessel showing her teeth at last and holding her position by a very force of will.

The force of will was Arnie's; with the passing of the hours it became theirs also. Charley Grant babbled of a miracle and watched heaven and earth tear by to the tune of a hellish chorus.

The crew, huddled just beneath the scuttle, peeped out and laid wagers on the topsail, on the staysail. Arnie steered the ship and shouted more fiercely than the wind, sang a saga of the North Country and gloried in the impossible.

By the morning the spray had turned the vessel to ice. Thus armored, the small patches of canvas continued to show. Notwithstanding that the storm abated not a jot for thirty hours, they made some infinitesimal headway. Coated heavily over her bows, the *Jessica* pitched deep and counted her lives as a cat might. In the middle of the second night the wind was no more than a gale. Another morning, and another sail was chopped out.

Through a monstrous sea a ship of glittering leprous white paid off and tacked northward for San Francisco.

This and this only was life to Arnie Sondheim. Life and to spare—just because he hated the sea and was beating it. When he passed the latitude of San Carlos the dream had him in its possession. He had forgotten the money. What was the thought of money to one who dreamed? Somewhere in the dream, unreal, a spirit, he wove the beauty of Lelona's face; but the dream was not of her; it seemed rather that the dream simply included her, being a dream of happiness utterly unreasonable.

Grant startled him by roaring out at his side:

"It's got you! You'll put it over! The men—show us all——"

"Show you what?" Arnie bellowed. "I'm saving the ship! Never saw —— put me under—Try the course! Quit preaching!"

But unreasonable dreaming could not continue indefinitely in Arnie's mind. He came to earth presently and patterned himself a reason for wishing to save the ship. There was no money without bringing in the ship; no Lelona without the money. Money! Money! The world was built upon money; he must learn that. Happiness was but a superstructure founded on money. Lelona had awakened him. The mate had tried to put him to sleep! He must not go to sleep; he had been asleep too long.

WARM weather at length, and the shifted wind standing off the quarter. With the warm weather a stifling, unbearable odor seeped out of the hold. The crew bore it silently until it became a stench. The dreaded contingency had come to pass; the hides had become soaked, despite them.

Men went sick and lost strength. Arnie perceived how they looked to him in their misery, and served out extra grog. He could stand it; he wondered that they could not; but even with the grog they could not.

Grant said:

"You can't ask it of them, sir. Shall we heave it out?"

"We'd be heaving out money." Arnie scowled at him. "It won't do."

But their faces haunted him thereafter; their trust in him, the remembrance of their words on that stormy day in the forecastle would not let him alone. He fought with his conscience. Money! Money! What did he care what they thought?

Grant looked mightily surprized. He asked—

"Do you mean that, sir?"

"Mean it? Why shouldn't I mean it?"

Queries like this fretted him as he had never been fretted before. His back was to the wall now. They were pressing him hard.

"I mean to succeed, Grant," he protested. "I've failed every way."

"You'll fail this way," Grant returned. "Money!" he mused and laughed.

Japes settled it.

"They ain't the stomicked men we be. What say, sir?"

"You're another one that says money is dirt, are you?" flashed Arnie.

The little cook batted his eyes to keep them from seeing too realistically the cottage on the Maine coast, the trawler all his own. He answered:

"I mind we be counseled not to lay up treasure on earth where moth an' rust doos corrupt. Money it means—aye, we'll be follerin' the Book."

So the hatches came open and the hides went splashing over the side. A bitter, cynical look Arnie put upon the matter, so poor a fatalist he was after all. Japes quite outdid him in this respect and sweated with the crew and sang fiercely.

But this did not end the trouble—oh, no; with the hides gone, the dullest eye could see where the water had entered. The *Jessica* had sprung her seams.

They had passed the equator and were rolling heavily in the arms of a stiff breeze when the announcement came from Grant. Arnie heard him mild-eyed.

"Get at the pumps!" he ordered. "I've sailed sinking ships before."

And when the crew had the word passed forward they cheered and went at the pumps as lustily, as unquestioningly as they had gone at the making of sail in the heart of the storm. Japes watched from the galley door and swore they were "nigh ez chirky ez whalers." Arnie glanced over the side and back at the sea that had gulped down the hides. She would drink less water sailing light, he admitted.

With the cargo sacrificed, he fell to figuring what the *Jessica* would bring in the market. This idea of money-value, this translation of life into a gold standard, possessed him every day more and more. He had been slow to comprehend Lelona's dismaying meaning; but now that he faced it squarely, nothing of Charley Grant's theory could shake it.

He did not, to be sure, subscribe personally to this creed of money; indeed, that was quite outside the question. The point was that under the conditions money constituted happiness; that his long-dreamed and always vague—even formless—dream could at last find shape and color by fitting into it the solid central figure of the world's judgment of wealth.

Grant rattled on of the world's opinion of a man. Well, the world's opinion he had always known was based on what a man

owned; what he could buy. While the crew pumped, he figured.

In the end his figuring, like the pumping of the crew, produced no more substantiality than its activity and its belief in itself. There was much to be gained; it ended there. He could not make a price by thinking it, nor could the laboring, sweating men make the pumps suck dry by hoping it.

When this fact of the vessel's condition dawned on the forecastle, the pumps did not cease to clank; rather, they clanked the harder, while all eyes centered upon Arnie. He perceived this and met those eyes with the laugh of perfect confidence; whereat they laughed, too, in their supreme confidence in him. They reasoned not at all in trusting him; he reasoned scarcely more in trusting himself. Hadn't he taken in sinking ships before?

To Grant he narrated the incident of the *Snowbird's* abandonment by her captain and of how Japes and he and a few others had worked her to San Francisco while her hold lay half-full of water. He spoke of the incident as nothing unusual.

Charley Grant gazed at him out of his strange, oppressed eyes. Fear had come back into those eyes again; he could not conquer it permanently.

"Did the others put it up to you, sir? Was that it?" he asked.

"Did they?" responded Arnie, grinning hugely. "They'd have given all they owned to take to the boat. I fought 'em! I made 'em stay! They didn't dare do otherwise. They hated me."

"It's different then," Grant suggested. He seemed to plead. "Not a man aboard here but thinks you know everything and can do anything. They'd never take to the boats till you gave the word. They don't even bother to look into the hatches." He strained forward. "But she leaks faster than they can pump, sir."

"Then, blow my ears, I'll teach 'em to pump!"

And Arnie flung out of the cabin and, whisking off his cap and his shirt, he spat on his hands and toiled on to the pump-handle. They turned expressive faces toward him and redoubled their energy. Arnie watched the deep draft of the full-set canvas speeding them northward—northward—and made the handle to dance with his furious determination.

ON—ON—past Point Sacrificios—past all that rugged Mexican coast—now Santa Rosa Island lifting out of the sea and bringing memories—Cape St. Lucas somewhere far to starboard. Blow, blow, wind! More sail! All she has—skys'ls—stu'ns'ls—crack 'em on! *Clank—slank!* And always the bubble and gush——

Japes showed a very desperation as he fought for a place with the others. Sea Otter Island—why, that meant the Farallones and Eugenie and a race, a race for two thousand dollars—maybe three—and a far-called scent not detectable to the nostrils of the lofty, resinous Maine woods crowding grandly to the rocky shore. High-pitched rang his singing; gleaming wet ran his pinched, anemic face. A race. A race against odds. He looked straight into Arnie's eyes; they exchanged wordless messages. It had been done before; it could be done again!

"God help us, sir!" hoarsely whispered Grant in Arnie's ear. "It's as high as ever! It's no go, sir! Shall I pass the word to abandon——"

" 'Fraid?" Arnie shot searchingly; and that dead-white calm petrified the mate's visage. Teeth set, lips moving inaudibly, he gripped the handle and pumped.

All Saints' Bay—how vividly Arnie recalled it! Then California—and the water gaining slightly—Point Concepcion—that was something like. Grant's face told him he should trim sail now and make straight in and beach her; but he was for San Francisco. Nowhere else was there money for the *Jessica*.

And now the water rose a full inch every quarter of an hour. Arnie's lightning mind calculated while his numbing arms rose and fell, pumping, pumping, pumping. Aye, they could make it, if the wind held and the strained pumps did not burst.

Ah! He had not considered that. The thought tormented him. They were aged pumps. The men must not be allowed to think of that. If they did——

They did not; it was not that; it was no more than evil chance which sent a sprawled, panting man too near the main hatch. The sound in that horrible hold—an eye turned downward observing the truth—the word brought to the captain as if—as if it were news. Then every pair of eyes gaped at him, not quite understanding, full of

wonder, swallowing ripe dread. He set himself to meet the rush for the boats, to battle their animal panic. If they were cowards, they would learn to fight.

But they did not come on. A hungry glance they cast at intervals toward the ready davits—then back at Arnie. They blinked; they tried to grin and only looked sickly in their coursing perspiration. Even Grant, his face the hue of ashes, gripped himself. Arnie heard him joke trivially; heard the crew laugh and grunt as they pumped—pumped—pumped. Of course, they would not rush for the boats—of course. He had not given the word. He felt the hot prickle of shame.

Almost at once then he began to be defensive in his mind. He fell to inward argument, though what he argued against or who or why, he did not comprehend. He knew in his heart he could bring in the vessel. His mathematics permitted of no least question. He had figured it to the last hour—except for the pumps. All the power enlisted here would stand firm—except the pumps. Well, that was the chance he took, he and they. There always had to be chances. They took them equally. Equally?

Aye, equally—except for their —— dependency. Hang them, why did they not make a break, mutter and cry out what they would do? Why? Why? But he knew why. He cursed the answer, cursed his clear knowledge of it. If they had but the veriest tithe of interest in the saving of the ship! They had not. They had but their faith.

He wrestled with himself even while he wrestled with the pumps. They grinned and wrestled along with him—and so made his wrestling the harder. The mate might have protested, had he not protested quickly enough earlier. He said nothing.

Three hundred miles out of port! He had sailed with masters who gave orders that endangered men every hour. Was he not captain here?

And round-faced, jolly-eyed Beals of the port watch mouthed:

"She'll do it, won't she, sir? Many's the cap'n 'ud be scairt, but not the likes o' you."

"It's knowin' o' yer wessel counts," gravely adjudged Mart Gronah.

Arnie made no reply. He strode to Charley Grant who, having sounded the well, was engaged in wiping the lead dry so that the depth would not show. Their eyes met. There was no rebuke in the mate's, neither rebuke nor protest. He essayed to shrug. Arnie asked him in a voice steady and loud enough for all to hear—

"What has she made, Mr. Grant?"

Grant glanced about and made to whisper. A gesture of Arnie's arm signified more than one might surmise. Grant answered aloud—

"Eight inches in an hour."

Wearily Arnie faced the pumps and the men clustered there.

"All hands stand to abandon ship!" he ordered.

To the mate who unseen grasped his hand and wrung it he gave a puzzled—or perhaps it was a stunned—look.

THE ship's company of the *Jessica* drifted two days and two nights in the open boat, all of them in the long boat—for their spirits' sake. But none of them felt it a very long time as open-boat drifting goes. They watched the ship founder and afterward discussed ardently the captain's astounding knowledge of the time of her sinking. Arnie listened to them and more and more forgot in the sound of their voices the dream that had faded.

It rained, keeping up a fine drizzle that wet them through but did not dampen their spirits. Arnie smiled at them through the mists; it was an art he had learned in seventeen years of sailing. It bespoke less an art, however, as they broke into Japes' "Jonah" song and roared it crazily. Their eyes on him in an effort to do whatever he asked fetched a glow quite incomprehensible to him, but which strengthened and deepened as the hours passed.

In his pocket, unread, lay a dirty yellow envelope containing a cablegram presenting him full-value insurance on the *Jessica* as a reward for bringing to attention the truth of the bark's stowage and burning. He did not look into his pocket. He sat soaked to the skin and wondered why this latest blow did not strike him down, fatalist though he had decided to be. But somehow it did not.

Japes doled out rations with the regularity of shipboard and taught the crew new verses of the "Jonah" song. He had seen his beloved flowered vest carefully wrapped

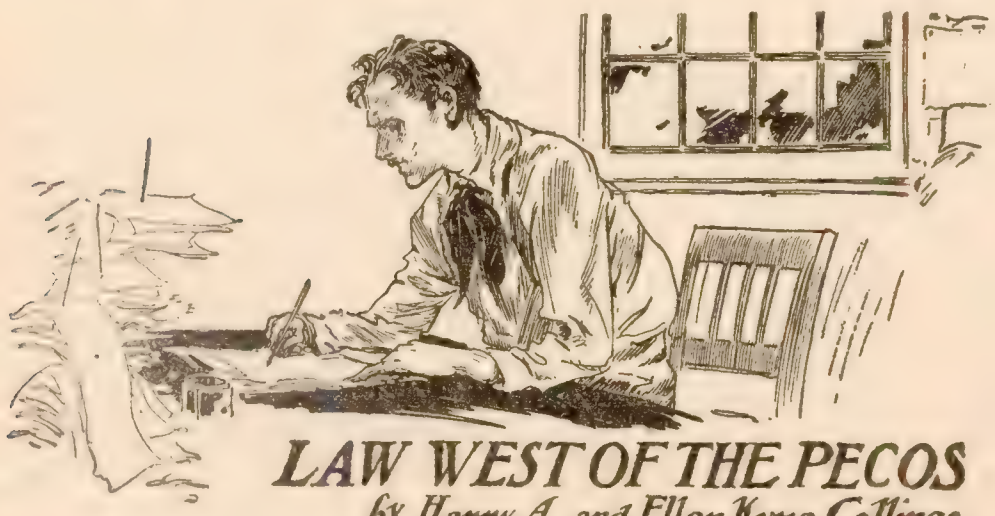
in Arnie's oilcoat and packed away snugly in the bit of a locker. He told the others—with generous embellishments—how he had nearly lost it upon a time; whereupon eyes and mouths gaped more than ever at Arnie, by reason of his thrilling rescue.

Charley Grant found occasion shortly before they were picked up to venture privately:

"I guess, sir, it's no trick to tell what some men are after in this life. Money, I recall, you named it. But I was right; you'll admit I was, sir. I said—why, you ought to see your face this minute!—I said you'd be the kind to put most store by the world's opinion. How about it, sir?"

"How's that?" Arnie turned to him as if he had been rudely interrupted. "Still talking that funny talk?" He frowned. "To —— with the world's opinion!"

What use had he for the world's opinion, indeed? He was grinning with unsuppressed pleasure at what these crude men bandied about concerning him. He was not exactly happy, but he was nearer to being happy than ever he had been before.



LAW WEST OF THE PECOS

by Harry A. and Ellen Kyne Collings

MICHAEL WINTHROP CONNOLLY was full of wrath, prickly heat, jiggers and *chile con carne*. The jiggers and *chile* had been accumulated in the same sand-blown eating-house. The prickly heat he had acquired gradually since his train had dropped below the Mason-Dixon line, but the *n*th degree of its torture was reached coincident with the flat, hot dulness of the west Texas plains. The wrath he had had thrust upon him by an irate pair of parents and the dean of the Harvard Law School, not any of whom could forgive him for a self-donated week's vacation at the world series. Neither could they understand a descendant of Governor Winthrop's desiring to follow the footsteps of Christy Matthewson in preference to those of William Blackstone.

He had a ticket through to Los Angeles, fifty dollars in his pocket, his last clean collar limp around his neck, and no definite plans for his future livelihood beyond a nebulous hope of signing on with one of the Coast teams.

So he ran his hands through an incandescent thatch of brick-colored hair, scowled his brows into fierce knots of angry muscle over his sherry-brown eyes, and thrusting his long legs out with small-boy violence, he contemplated the last pair of custom-made shoes that he expected to wear for some good few years.

A door banged open, the brakeman bawled, "Next station Val Verde," and Michael Winthrop leaned hopefully from his window to view the town whose name sounded to him like cool drops of falling water. It was, alas! anything but verdant. Out of the dun mass of saloons, dancing-halls, Mexican *chile* parlors and sprawling houses, one building assaulted his

attention as the train slacked down at the station.

It was a weather-beaten building with the usual cow-town false second story, and besides the pair of swinging doors and two opaque windows its front was embellished with a startling aggregation of signs.

BENJAMIN GOODE'S OPERA HOUSE, TOWN HALL & SEAT OF JUSTICE.

WINES, LIQUORS, CIGARS & JUSTICE.

JUDGE BENJAMIN GOODE, LAW WEST OF THE PECOS.

He read no further, but snatching up his cap made for the door.

Mangy cur dogs and hound pups snapping languidly at flies obstructed Connolly's path from the train to the steps of the gallery, and groups of Mexicans with corn-husk cigarets dangling from their lips made as little effort as the dogs to move away from the door and give himself and a fellow tourist entrance.

Outside it was a hundred and ten but inside it surely reached sixteen. The narrow room was crowded with lank individuals wispy of mustache, bowed as to legs, guile, less, but penetrating as to eyes.

At the far end of the room a stumpy mild-faced old man sat behind a plain deal table. Beyond the antique six-shooter that weighted down the open volume before him, there was little indication of the characteristics that blazoned him to the world as Law west of the Pecos.

As the strangers entered, the judge pounded on the table with an ordinary claw-hammer and drawled in the tone of a benevolent old circuit-rider reading the text for the day—

"Court will adjourn for two-three minutes."

He removed his long, judicial frock coat with ponderous ceremony and in his resultant white-shirtedness stepped in behind the bar.

"Will you name your pleasure, sirs?"

Michael Winthrop ordered a bottle of beer and laid down a half-dollar. The other ordered the same, sliding a ten-dollar gold-piece across the bar. The judge pocketed both coins and stepped back to his table. He resumed his frock coat, rapped on the table, smoothed his thin white beard deliberately, and announced:

"Court is again opened. Bill Kincheloe is reminded that all weapons is in his custody and must remain so until court is adjourned for the day."

Michael Winthrop's amused eye now noted the orderly pile of miscellaneous hardware back of the bar, with Kincheloe on guard, and the embarrassment of numbers present who swung empty holsters at their thighs. He felt that he was in a foreign land, and that in the event of trouble the wise thing would be to make for the nearest American consul.

Judge Benjamin Goode went on administering law west of the Pecos.

"Testimony shows that the deceased was found daid—drowndaid—on the banks of the Pecos, with forty dollars and a six-gun, and no marks of identification. As his murderous intents is unquestionable in entering our peaceful little community totin' a gun, it is the order of the Court that deceased be fined forty dollars, and that further——"

"Say, you, where's my change?" broke in the owner of the gold-piece.

"Order in the court! Order in the court!" Judge Goode commanded as he rapped on the table with his hammer. "It is the further order of this Court——"

"See here, you give me——"

"Stranger, you are in contempt o' court!"

"Contempt be ——! You fork out my nine dollars and fifty cents."

"For contempt o' court, and the use of profane language in the hall of justice——"

"Give me my change!"

"You are hereby fined nine dollars and fifty cents."

The engine gave its warning whistle. The wild-eyed tourist realized that he could choose between losing his train or losing his money. He sputtered incoherently, while Michael Winthrop rocked with the first real laughter he had known since Boston.

"I'll take this matter up," the man exploded. "You'll see. I'll appeal——"

"Sir, there ain't no sech thing as appeal where I'm concerned. Benjamin Goode is Law west of the Pecos."

The empurpled tourist flung out the swinging doors and made for his train. Connolly tore wildly after him, dashed into the coach, and, seized with a sudden freakish determination, grasped his belongings,

threw them to the platform and leaped to the ground as the train gained headway.

He returned to the town hall, up-ended his suit-case and sat down to listen.

"Inasmuch as Sam Davis, out of a Christian spirit and with the welfare and health of the sovereign State of Texas at heart, has given the deceased fitten burial, it is the order of the Court that said Sam Davis be recompensed with the deceased's six-gun which appears to be in reasonable working-order. The estate of the departed unknown having been duly probated, court is now closed and Bill Kincheloe is forthwith instructed to return all weapons to their rightful owners."

He dropped his official dignity and his frock coat and walked behind the bar.

"Name your pizen, gentlemen."

He turned warmly to Michael Winthrop.

"Won't you jine us, sir? We aim to consume your friend's nine-fifty."

THE crowd thinned at last, and Michael Winthrop found himself alone with Judge Goode.

"I haven't told you who I am," and Connolly's first impulse was to reach for his card-case; but stifling this he put out his hand and with his friendly baseball player's grin said—

"My name's Connolly, Mike Connolly of Boston."

For perhaps the first time in his twenty-five years Connolly had failed to introduce himself as Michael Winthrop Connolly, and so had failed to elicit the inquiry—

"Are you a descendant of Governor Winthrop?"

"Well, sir, by gracious, I'm glad to know you." This from the judge.

"I suppose you've been wondering what made me leave my train and come back?"

"It mought be so. If so you want to tell me how come you stopped off at Val Verde I'm a-listening. If not, there's heaps of other conversation."

"I took a liking to Val Verde and its ways as I listened to your court-proceedings. It looked to be about the most different place from Boston that a man could find."

"Well, she's a nice little town, quiet and peaceable. They ain't been a killing in four months. Well, sir, by gracious—" the judge pulled out an antique inch-thick watch with a chased-gold case worn smooth as glass—"Val Verde has increased her permanent population by one adult male, the Court has probated that poor pilgrim's estate, and I reckon we-all better be hitting out for home. Mother gets a leetle mite put out if I'm late for meals."

Mike protested valiantly and sincerely, for his acquaintance with Texan or other country hotels was that of the babe unborn, but the judge merely picked up one of Connolly's bags, urged the young man into the cooling evening air, slammed the door to, without locking, and closed the town hall and seat of justice for the day.

Coatless business men in white or near-white boiled shirts, wearing their vests as a mild concession to convention but omitting collars and ties as a concession to comfort, idled before their stores in the slack half-hour before closing.

Judge Goode introduced Mike.

"My friend, Michael Connolly, sirs."

Much shaking of the horniest hands that Mike had ever grasped, offers of licorice-cured plugs, repeated reckonings that he would sure like the town and surrounding country.

One citizen shook Mike's hand as if it were the hand of the Governor of Texas, and asked in admiring but regretful tone—

"You the new editor, eh?"

The judge gave a little start.

"Why, no, sir, he ain't. That feller that was coming from the Houston *Post* sent a wire this morning and I guess he's changed his mind."

"Sho' now, editors is gettin' scarce, ain't they? Yes, sir, they sure is."

As they walked the straggling three or four blocks to Judge Goode's home, Mike was aware of a keener scrutiny in the old man's eye as it rested upon him. It reminded Connolly of his Boston tailor's critical way of inspecting a suit at the final fitting.

They turned in at a gate guarded by two "cemetery trees," and walked through an old-fashioned garden crowded with zinnias, petunias, marigolds and sunflowers.

"Mother," explained the judge to the short, white-haired, high-stomachered old lady on the front gallery, "this is my friend, Michael Connolly of Boston, and I reckon he'll stop with us a spell."

"Be you the new editor?" she queried anxiously, her mild moss-agate eyes lingering on Mike's, and Mike was puzzled at

the look of relief that came to her face when he answered in the negative.

At breakfast the next morning while Mrs. Goode hovered over them with dishes of fried pork, milk gravy and hot biscuits, the judge was interested to know if Connolly was still firm in his intention to remain in Val Verde.

Connolly was sure of himself.

"I was ordered to 'Go West, young man, and grow up with the country,' and if Val Verde has not yet reached her legal majority I think I'll stay and grow up with her."

"Well, sir, by gracious, she'll be pleased. What you reckon on doing whilst you and her's reaching votin' age?"

From Mike's very patent evidences of material prosperity the judge had rather looked for mention of investments. It would not have surprized the old man had Mike spoken of investing anywhere from ten to one hundred thousand dollars in cattle, mines or Bermuda onions.

But he was not prepared for the dull flush that rose above Mike's last no-longer-clean collar, or for the thick, embarrassed—

"I'll do anything for a bit that will pay my keep." Something in the homely parental kindness of the two old people had kept Mike from telling anything but the truth of his financial situation.

"What you fitted to do?"

"I'm not really fitted to do anything."

"I judge you got a college education, ain't you?"

"A part of one. I had an A. B. and was studying law—was nearly through my course—when they threw me out."

"Threw you out, eh, and ordered you West?"

"See here, judge." Mike cleared a little space on the table before him so he could lean forward and talk into the old man's face. "If you—if you—are going to be my guide, philosopher and friend here in Val Verde—and it looks as if you meant to be so—let me tell you a little about myself. My great-grandfather came to Boston from Ireland, a plain man, an uneducated man—but what a head for business! We have a painting of him. It hangs in my father's library, not the drawing-room. A reproduction of the Van Dyck portrait of Governor Winthrop presides there. But my great-grandfather—" the young man seemed to visualize him proudly as he spoke —"he was a fine old chap, fine-looking, like Henry Clay or William McKinley. He made millions paving the streets of Boston."

"Well, he must have been a pretty fine old chap."

"My grandfather married Patience Winthrop. I remember my grandmother, stiff black silk dress, Chantilly lace shawl, ivory-headed cane and all. Oh, the real thing! But my grandfather never stopped being grateful to a Winthrop for marrying a Connolly."

"No woman wants a man being everlastingly grateful because she married him," broke in Mrs. Goode.

"My father was raised to the idea of using the Connolly money and power to keep the Winthrop family tree green and thriving. Mother was an Addicott, my sisters are perfect Puritan products, but I'm a throw-back."

The judge nodded understandingly.

"Get a bit of Holstein blood in a bunch of Herefords, and you'll sure draw black and white calves ever' so often."

"No one in our family has had red hair and freckles since grandfather Connolly's grandmother, and in spite of Governor Winthrop I've always had a natural taste for common things and common people."

The judge rose and beamed down at Mike quizzically.

"Young fellow, what you needed was a change of range and feed. Yes, sir, by gracious, you needed to get away from where the breaking waves dash high on that stern and rock-bound coast and come West to where the horned frog mourneth for its first-born and the side-winder croons to its mate. You prospect round and see if you can land a job to your liking, and remember here's your home."

FOR two weeks Mike ranged Val Verde and its environs in search of employment, but a recent big cinnabar strike had brought in more experienced labor than the mines could use, and it was the between round-ups season at the ranches. Once or twice it was too evident that a vacancy was being created as a favor to the old judge, and Mike refused.

Venturing into a poker-game, the major portion of his fifty had disappeared like snows on the brine, and Mike's wide grin was making fewer and fewer public appearances, when, one morning after breakfast the old judge invited him for a walk.

They passed the last tumbled-down Mexican *jacals* and followed an informal road that meandered over a gentle rise to the Val Verde cemetery.

At the gate of the wire enclosure the judge paused.

"Mike, I got a proposition for you."

Mike hung his elbows on the top wire and gloomed moodily over the purple and gold plains, where the early heat-devils were shimmering above the mesquite and the cactus.

"Propose, judge. I'm a-listening."

"This here paper of mine, the *Daily Dove*, that's been coming out hit and miss as you may've noticed; it needs an editor. The one I had left me kinda sudden three-four days before you came."

"All right, judge." Mike brightened. "I'm on."

"Wait a minute, Mike."

The judge opened the gate and they entered the little graveyard. The old man pointed a solemn finger to three wooden headboards, one freshly painted white, one a mellow gray, and one weather-beaten and undecipherable.

"Young man, there sleep three of your predecessors!"

"Well, judge, there's room for another between that end and the fence. I'll take a chance."

"But quick and accurate shooting is the only way a man can hold down this here job. You a good shot?"

"Never toted a gun in my life."

"Dad burn it, I never thought the Yankees were that short on a man's education."

"Judge, what's this job worth?"

"Well, if you're worth anything to anybody except the undertaker at the end of the week, you'll be worth twenty dollars to me."

"From sudden and unprovided death, O Lord, deliver us," prayed Mike laughingly. "Let's get back to town and start editing."

At the door of the *Daily Dove*, Judge Goode fumbled for the keys in the tail-pocket of his frock coat.

"By gracious, sir, I almost kinder hate to see you start. It ain't too late yet to back out."

"I'm all out of backing-out-juice," responded Mike stubbornly.

The judge sighed resignedly.

"They's a printer should be here, but I reckon he's out somewhere h'isting a few. He's leaded and he thinks Doc Hermitage is his only cure. You want me to go over to Clabe Terril's and choose you out a nice little gun?"

"You forget, friend, that for generations the Winthrops have wielded the pen, and the Connollys the shillalah and the half-brick. I'm one of the fools who believe, as the advertisement says, that you need a hammer to hammer the hammer. I'd be as helpless with a gun as a two-year-old."

"You certainly are sot in your ways, by gracious— Just a parting word about the policy of the *Daily Dove*. Fearless and uncompromising is the idee. Them that set in high places has the same chance of being showed up as them that set in low places; if they're up to any monkey-shines. And bear in mind, Mike, that a right smart dog-fight on the main street of Val Verde, well writ up, is a sight more important and readable to our subscribers than a passel of anarchists chasing the Grand Duke of Russia through Moscow in his shirt-tail."

Mike took his bearings in the office, wandered about in the press-room, spoke a few well-chosen words to the printer, who had returned via the back door, decided that he would leave this end of the business to the victim of printer's poisoning, and returned to his battered flat-topped desk.

"Oh, Lord, if father could see where his erring son has landed!"

With the thought of his father there came the realization that he had one thing in common with the citizens of Val Verde. The sons of Erin and the sons of the solid South both followed the Democratic mule until death us do part.

"I shall write a Democratic editorial," he decided with satisfaction. "Walloping the tariff is always safe."

And wallop it he did with Boston purity of language and Hibernian strength of idea.

"Thank goodness the tariff doesn't tote a gun," he chuckled, when, having handed his maiden editorial to the printer, he clapped on his hat, and singing under his breath as contentedly as a white leghorn hen about to lay an egg, he struck out on the main street for the gulch by the cemetery.

The town loafers eyed him commiseratingly as a brand about to be thrown to the burning, for the word had already gone out about his new editorial position. He pictured these lean, wind-bitten sons of Texas discussing his sudden demise over

their tall toddies, and comforted himself as best he could with the thought that he had a trick or two up his sleeve.

He kept on until he came to the first old prospect-hole. He kicked about among the dumps, hefting and sorting rocks, and filled his side pockets with the egg-shaped rocks which seemed to be his preference, though some he chose were square-cornered and roughly jagged. Any old prospector would have recognized the specimens for sulfid of lead, or galena.

"Life is certainly going to be lively in my orbit," Mike reflected. "Now is the time to subscribe."

At the office he turned his desk so that it commanded the full length of the room and an unobstructed view of the window and the front door. Then he emptied all but one or two of his specimens into the right-hand top drawer of his desk, which he did not close, hung the editorial hat upon a nail and sat down to re-wallop the tariff against the next day's issue.

During the weeks that followed the office of the *Daily Dove* was as calm and peaceful as the babies' ward in a hospital just after feeding-time. Bill helped dig out the locals as he ran his morning gantlet between the Bourbon and the rye, and Judge Goode came in now and then with a special.

At the judge's request Mike wrote a fearlessly scathing attack on the Honorable "Mesquite" Brush, local congressman, who was up for reelection the next year. Mike was prayerfully thankful that the Honorable Mesquite was in far-away Washington and would be for some time longer. He had no desire to draw first blood from such an eminent source; though if he must be killed, he much preferred that the killing be done by an angry member of Congress rather than by a local bad man. It would look far better in the telegrams home.

Mike fairly frothed at the mouth—on paper. But years of such attacks had rendered Mesquite's hide thick. It served, however, to get Mike's hand in, and his progress up Main Street was thereafter gratifyingly interrupted by congratulations on his ability to roast a body to a turn.

HE DUG into the volumes of poetry by Southern bards on the office book-shelves and into volumes of Confederate history and back numbers of Southern publications in Judge Goode's small library, and was amazed and thrilled at the wealth of romance which they unfolded.

He drew from this illimitable source for his daily filler-in. They were old, old tales to the people of the South, but Michael Connolly's blood was tingling to them for the first time, and his fresh and boyish perspective, transmitted in his writing, lent to old tales the charm of the ever new.

So far it was the greatest fun in the world getting out a country paper, and all Val Verde and his kinfolk agreed that it was the greatest fun in the world to read the paper Mike got out.

In many other ways Mike endeared himself to his new townspeople. When Val Verde was threatened with a cutting down of the train and mail service, it was Connolly who went to San Antonio and convinced the powers of the unwisdom of their decision.

Again, when Beaufort James shipped cattle to an obscure Kansan packing-firm and the firm went bankrupt, it was Mike's crisp and knowledgeable legal phraseology that bore down the slick Kansas shyster and won James a proper settlement.

Much inspired by these victories, Mike sent home for his law-books, and his spare evenings were spent reading law and discussing it with Judge Goode.

He was consulting with Bill, the compositor, over the splendidly increased advertising early one afternoon, when the judge steamed in. He was singing:

> "I dreamt a dream th' other night,
> When everything was still;
> I dreamt I saw my Susan Jane
> Come rollin' down th' hill.
> A buckwheat cake was in her hand,
> A tear was in her eye;
> I sez 'My dearest Susan,
> Oh! Susan, don't yuh cry.' "

Bill looked up in quick alarm. It was the judge's storm-signal, and Bill, who knew it of old, oozed silently into the press-room.

The judge slammed his hat down on the table and exploded.

"Wes Pritchard has just hit town. He's loaded up already on squirrel-pizen and rot-gut. He's busted the mirrors in the Iron Front, smashed a crate of eggs all over the Nonpareil Grocery, and he's up at the Cowboys' Rest now, raising merry ——.

"Of course he always pays the damage when he sobers up, but last two-three

times, he's taken to messing up the grocery and merchandise stores, and that scares the women and children. I want him writ up, and writ up like ——. Make an example of him. Learn the community that him and his kind has got to steer clear of Val Verde. Blister him till you take the hide off."

He looked Mike square in the eye. Discretion whispered in one of Connolly's ears, "Write your resignation and take the next train out," but the wraith of Brian Boru whispered in the other ear, "Go afther him!"

He reached for pencil and paper.

"If I have Bill hold the forms, I can get that in this afternoon's issue."

The judge stifled the desire to pound Connolly on the back. Instead he calmly picked up his hat and departed to administer law west of the Pecos.

Mike felt as if his heart were a whole fife and drum corps, with every beat pounding out "There'll Be a Hot Time In the Old Town Tonight."

Bill reappeared, full of alcohol and printer's ink.

"Hold the forms a while," ordered Mike. "I've got a rush here."

"What is it? A wreck on the Sunset?"

"I'm going to roast Wes Pritchard."

"Want me to witness your 'I, Michael Connolly, being of sane mind,' et cetery?"

"Not yet, Bill."

"Nothing to leave but your personal effects? Where do you want them shipped when massa's in de cold, cold ground?"

"Shut up, Bill, till I get this written."

Connolly gnawed on his thumb-nail.

"The hide might as well go with the tail," he concluded, and the result was pure vitriol.

Bill devoured the first two lines with avidity.

"I sure hope the new editor will write a plainer hand," was his only comment.

It was Bill's long established custom to deliver Judge Goode's copy of the *Daily Dove* at the hall of justice. This little attention was good for at least one drink and sometimes two, and Bill would have crawled there on his hands and knees with the paper in his teeth.

At five-thirty that afternoon Bill cashed in his *Dove* for his drink, and became an innocent bystander. The judge spread the paper on the bar. On the front page in two-inch letters this headline caught his eye:

WORTHLESS MISCREANT IS ORDERED OUT OF TOWN.

"Herd up, boys, herd up," he whooped. The crowd surged close while the judge read the article aloud. Taking advantage of the excitement, Bill helped himself to a second drink and, finding himself still unnoticed, stood the bottle on its head.

"By gravy, the spunky cuss tells him to leave town by noon!"

" 'An eczematous excrescence on the face of Val Verde!' Say, what do you reckon that means?"

" 'A putrescent souse! An alcoholic sponge! An imbecilic vandal!' "

"They ain't no more left to Wes' character than a plucked jaybird!"

By night every one from the stable boy at the Pioneer Livery to the waitress at the Acme Hotel was wild-eyed with excitement. Each person advanced a different theory as to the outcome. Bad men had been slapped mildly upon the wrist by previous editors, but no bad man had ever been called an eczematous excrescence and told to get out of town and stay out.

Devious theories were advanced as to how Mike would back up his words, for the whole town knew that Mike had never packed a gun. There were two near fights and one flourishing of a pistol on the head of it.

The only calm person in town was Wes Pritchard himself, who lay in a drunken stupor in a stall at the Pioneer Livery. His head rested on his saddle, his tongue hung out like a red-plush necktie, and he resisted all efforts of Ace, the stable boy, to wake him and make him explain how he came to be a putrescent souse and other terrible things far beyond his or Ace's comprehension.

MIKE rose early the next morning. Mrs. Goode fluttered over him, silent but affectionate, like a Spartan mother. The judge ate little and finally rose from the table and stood beside Connolly, stroking his beard with an agitation strangely foreign.

He gripped Mike by the shoulder.

"You got this all reasoned out in your haid, I reckon, but ain't they anything I can do or say for you?"

"Not a thing in the world, thank you, sir. If I come out of this all right—well, all right. If not—" he looked up at the judge with a twisted grin—"bury me where the arrow falls."

Mike remained at the table after the judge had left. Over and over he was rehearsing just what he meant to do, calculating to the minutest fraction of a second all that would take place. There was no doubt about Pritchard's being up and abroad, for with the first peep of day Mike well knew that Ace would be sitting on Wes' chest with renewed imploring for explanations.

As Mike stepped out the gate, a couple of young boys were putting an old baseball down the groove, with the top of a worn-out camp-stove for a plate.

"Here, give me a try at that old apple," he called out, and for the next few minutes he tied them around the youngsters' ears until they were dizzy.

"Aw, be a sport!" they complained. "Take off your coat and stay with it. This is the last time you'll warm up that old soup-bone anyway."

But Mike shook off their importunities, cut across lots and started down Main Street with the boys following at a safe but still advantageous distance.

When Mike swung down upper Main Street a hundred eyes noted at once that his right hand rested lightly in the pocket of his blue serge coat.

"Oh, mommer!" wailed a cowboy. "He's heard tell o' Sam Bass' hip-shootin'. Might jes' as well 'a' let that four six-bits he's wasted on a gun go into his estate."

"Give th' boy credit," took up another. "He aims to go through th' motions o' defendin' himself."

As Mike approached the Iron Front and the Pioneer Livery next door his every sense was quickened to its keenest. Ace was flattened like a fly against the front of the livery stable, bug-eyed, but grimly determined to be in at the death.

Some sudden access of terror on Ace's face gave Mike intuitive warning. Just as Pritchard lurched evil-eyed from the stable doorway, Connolly's right hand whipped from his pocket, his arm swung round, and something shot forth just the decisive second before Pritchard's gun spat. The next instant Mike ducked and slid home as Wes' bullet went wild over his head.

Wes gave a grunt like a sledged hog, teetered for a moment on his high heels, and sprawled on his back in a sodden heap.

"Some —— new-fangled gun," shouted some one. "No flash, no smoke, no report."

Excited cries from up and down the street, and the crowd closed in. There was an ugly bruise over Pritchard's left temple, from which the blood trickled in a dark, sluggish stream across his unshaven cheek and down the open collar of his shirt.

Doc Wilkins forced his way through the crowd. Kneeling by the inert figure, he felt the pulse, listened for the heart, and finally turned back Pritchard's eyelids. Wes' glazing eyes, fully dilated, stared up at the crowd.

"The man is dead," the doctor pronounced, brushing the stable dust from his trousers.

"Dead! Good ——, I only meant to stun him."

"Stun him? Stun him? Man, what was your weapon?"

"He done it with a rock," shrilled Ace gleefully. "I got it right here. This galena specimen. I'm gonna keep it. It's mine. Gee, Mr. Connolly, did yuh usta pitch for the Red Sox?"

In the ensuing exciting babble Connolly felt a hand on his arm and turned to face Judge Goode.

"Come on, son, jes' get away from here."

THEY walked toward the seat of justice. Mike's knees were feeling wabbly and he bit down hard on his lower lip to control a wretched feeling of nausea. At the town hall he dropped into a chair. The judge went around behind the bar and from a private locker brought out a bottle, from which even the local congressman had never partaken. For a while they sat over their drinks in silence.

"I hope you don't think I let them other fellows get shot up jes' out of natural brutality and orneryness? You don't, do you?"

"No, they took the chance when they took the job."

"You're right. I warned them. They wa'n't only two killed. The third was a lunger. Got too excited arguing with a bad Mexican and died of a hemorrhage. A sight bigger bunch jumped the first train out and sent back for their duds afterwards. I could have handled the bad men myself, but I had a little idea in my old

haid. You've heard tell of ordeals by fire and water?"

"I have."

"Mike, the *Daily Dove* is my hobby, but she's a paying hobby as you must know by now, for she covers all this end of west Texas. Now I always reckoned if I got the right young fellow to run her they wa'n't no limit to the influence he could swing, and they wa'n't no limit to what he could be in west Texas with me and the *Dove* behind him. You made a likely start in this yere town from the very first, and when you ease off a few more of Pritchard's breed, you'll be the little white-haired boy of west Texas."

"A few more! Lord, judge, I never aimed to kill the one I did."

"Well, if you hadn't killed Wes this time you'd had to kill him all over the next. It mought be nobody will ever tackle you after this, but you want to be prepared. But now, you divarted me from my rat-killing. We've sent Mesquite Brush to Congress for the last two-three terms, and Mesquite, he sends back pamphlets on tomato-canning clubs when there ain't ary tomato in Cayote County. He makes long-winded speeches about child-labor in mills and a minimum wage for wimmin, and franks back copies to the district, when what we want is some government help with the foot and mouth disease and the Texas tick, and what we really need is an irrigation project for the Little Pecos."

"Then I should have rocked Mesquite to sleep instead of Pritchard?"

"No, you got the right man sure 'nough—Mike, when you told me your family pedigree I says to myself, 'The boy knows law, the Irish can argue, the Winthrops were statesmen three hundred years ago, and no man ever got the paving contracts in any city that wa'n't a natural politician.' I made Mesquite Brush, but he's had his day."

An excited group of men surged through the door discussing Pritchard's death and the unique method thereof with keen appreciation. Benjamin Goode sprang to his feet and pounded on the bar.

"Gentlemen," he orated, "let me present Michael Winthrop Connolly, the man that Val Verde is going to send to Congress next year to make law for west of the Pecos."

COUNTING COUP

BY FRANK H. HUSTON

THE word as used by whites was given by the Canadian French but bears no relation whatever to the meaning in that language.

With most tribes, the first who strikes, or even touches the body of an enemy in a fight is credited with the killing; with others the act is even more meritorious than the actual killing; more so during the days of bows and arrows alone, when the greatest achievement was to strike an enemy first (count coup) and then kill him, this being considered the acme of bravery.

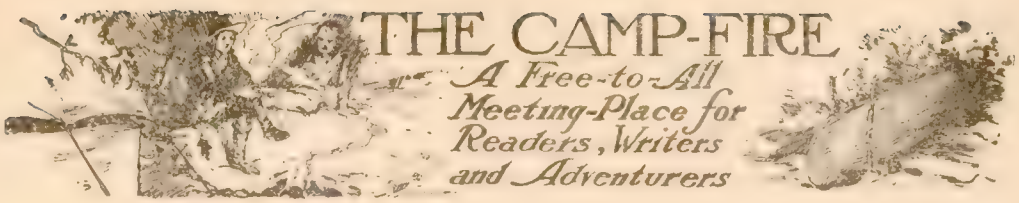
A long, slender stick is carried for the purpose, and in charging the village, if one strikes a teepee with it, the tent and contents belong to him, the same rule applying to ponies, women, etc., captured, but it should not be forgotten that the counting or striking a coup must be done in the heat of battle.

A whip, club, or any kind of stick may be used and some were accustomed to notch the same as an aid to remembrance of the coups struck—custom probably borrowed by white gunmen who "notched" their guns for each killing—and as a wounded Indian settled to his deadliest aim, mortal wounds only intensifying the desire to kill, it may be seen that he who counts coup runs the greatest danger.

The Cheyennes claim "the old woman in the cave" told some of their medicine-men in the "long ago" how to make a medicine coup-stick, and by carrying it when going to war an enemy could not hit them.

By riding close to an enemy, shaking the sticks and making a peculiar noises, the enemy became paralyzed with fear and of course was at their mercy.

A coup-stick being a valuable testimony of the owner's prowess, was carefully treasured and inherited from father to son.



JUST to claim credit for our magazine as not being a profiteer, while the cost to us of our metal identification-cards has gone up, we are still furnishing them to you at the old price. Formerly there was a little margin that covered at least part of the cost of handling. The last batch we ordered, which have been going out to you for some time, cost us exactly $.259 apiece from the manufacturer, but we expect to hold right on to the $.25 price to you.

I don't know that we're so blamed noble after all, for it does our magazine good just to have the cards carried by thousands of people. Just the same, according to the prevailing style of soaking the "common people" all they can be soaked, a cost price like that on our cards would be all that was needed to raise the price of a commodity from 25 to 50 cents, or 75 or a dollar and a half or almost any old figure. Gentlemen selling food, clothing and fuel please note our little old magazine's little old example.

Cardboard identification-cards are, of course, still issued free.

As to our Camp-Fire buttons, we still have them from stock at the old price, which, as I remember it, was a bit under the 25-cents cost to you. I don't think the manufacturing cost will be raised on these, for we've had a bid from another manufacturer which promises to hold it down.

Before sending for either card or button, please read carefully the information about them given in every issue on the "Service Page" following "Camp-Fire." Any one, of course, is entitled to either.

WHILE we're having this little "business meeting" about Camp-Fire affairs, I'll venture to make a brief report on our magazine itself. You know I don't ballyhoo for the magazine at Camp-Fire, but I know you have a real interest in its affairs and will be glad to know that, in these days when paper, transportation and labor conditions make it hard sledding for magazines in general, ours is booming along. Doing better than ever before. Growing so fast and solidly that, if we could get the paper—well, I won't go into the "ifs." The actual accomplished facts are good enough in themselves.

AS TO our Camp-Fire Stations. The plan is working out very satisfactorily. It takes time to develop as big a thing as that, but our progress so far is more than encouraging. As the practical and social value of the Stations is demonstrated more and more in actual practise, the number of Stations will increase more and more rapidly. It is particularly to be hoped that more and more of you will see in the Stations a nucleus for developing local clubs along informal or formal lines so that those of us who live near one another can get into touch, meet those of kindred tastes, and have a meeting place where common interest can be centered.

There are so many lines along which such local clubs can be instituted and developed that I hesitate to make any suggestions, particularly as it is distinctly a matter for each local group to decide for itself according to its own wishes. Possibly it would be best to do as the New York and Chicago Adventurers' Clubs began—with nothing but a monthly dinner. Possibly, merely to pass the word around that on certain nights the Station was to be considered a rallying point where any and all who liked could drop in and swap yarns and bits of news. Or any other of a hundred plans, leaving experience to dictate furture development. The connection of a local club with other local clubs would be decided altogether by the local clubs themselves. There would, of course, be no obligation to the magazine except the unwritten obligation that rests upon all of us not to do anything under the name of Camp-Fire

that would cast any discredit upon Camp-Fire itself and upon all those of us who like to gather in its warmth.

Here is a list of Stations already established and in actual operation. Drop in on them when passing that way.

CANADA—Vancouver, B. C. C. Plowden, B. C. Drafting & Blue Print Co.
Burlington, Ontario. Thos. Jocelyn.
Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
The Post Weekly, Deseronto. Harry M. Moore.
Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
Montreal, P. Q. Nelson J. Cook, 2037 St. Catharine St., E.
Winnipeg, Man., Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy Street.

CALIFORNIA—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 1036 Thirtieth St.
Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Pet. No. 2.
San Bernardino. Mrs. R. Souter, 275 K St.
Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.

CANAL ZONE—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.

COLORADO—Denver. Elwood Claughton, 1234 Elati Street.

CUBA—Havana. B. N. Faries, Dominquer 7 Cerro.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA—Washington. Fagan's Cigar Store, 1404 New York Ave., N. W.

HONDURAS, C. A. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson, Galeras, Olancho.

INDIANA—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East 18 St.

ILLINOIS—Chicago. John Bradford Main, care of The Junior Yanks, 144 S. Wabash Ave.

LOUISIANA—New Orleans. W. A. Bussey, St. Louis Cafe, Dauphine and St. Louis Sts.

MAINE—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.

MASSACHUSETTS—Malden. Arthur R. Lloyd, 16 Cross St.

MICHIGAN—Marquetta. T. Mitchell, Box 864, G. P. O.

NEW JERSEY—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard, P. O. Box 13
Bayonne, N. J. J. D. Gray, 92 West Sixth St.

NEW YORK—N. Y. C. Robt. V. Steel, care of American Legion, 19 West 44 St.
Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 12 Fairview Ave.
Yonkers. A. F. Whegan, 173 Elm St.

OREGON—Marshfield. F. J. Webb, 200 Market Ave.
Salem. D. Wiggins.

PENNSYLVANIA—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street.

TEXAS—Wichita Falls. A. M. Barlow, P. O. Box 51.
Houston. M. B. Couch, Route 2, Box 189.

WASHINGTON—Republic. A. E. Beaumont, Box 283.
Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billard Hall.
Seattle, Wash. H. C. Copeland, The Western Sportsman, 83 Columbia St.

WISCONSIN—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9 Tenny Bldg.
Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle Street.

GUNPOWDER, the compass, spectacles, all these inventions have been attributed to early Chinese civilization. "China Tom" tells about greater wonders than these. Anybody tell us more about this tradition, legend or parable?

Washington, D. C.

I happened to be looking through the *All Story Weekly* (June 21, 1919), and in the "Heart-to-Heart" talks I noticed a letter from "A Reader" saying they knew a Chinaman called "China Tom" in Helena, Montana, in the 80's.

This Chinaman often told a story of China having, thousands of years ago, electric cars, flying-machines, and all manner of labor saving devices, even greater than the present age. Everything was even more advanced than in present times, so much so that no one was required to work; that the effect, morally, was so bad that the emperor was obliged to destroy it all. He claimed this tradition was handed down from generation to generation.

Now, I wonder if any members of Camp-Fire have heard of this legend, and if they have, from whom.—ALBERT WILLIAMS.

SOMETHING about a little known phase of Kit Carson's life in a letter written by Mr. McCafferty in the Summer of 1919. (By this time I don't need to explain that letters to Camp-Fire go into our cache and are drawn out for printing very largely according to chance.) I'm writing to the descendant of Carson and hope we may be hearing from him.

Arlington, Texas.

A relative of the great Kit Carson has just moved to Fort Worth, Texas, to reside. His great-grandmother was a half-sister of Carson's, she being a member of her mother's first group of children and Carson fifth child of the second group. That would make this kinship something like a one-half degree third nephew of the great Indian fighter and all-round he-man. This relative has just learned something new regarding the first wife of the scout. She was a beautiful Arapaho Indian and Carson first met her while interceding in her behalf against a drunken Frenchman named Shunar, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Frenchman hated Americans and made it a point to kill every one that "crossed his path." When the argument arose between the two men, Carson said, "I am an American, and if you are determined to die, I am your man."

The Frenchy's yellow streak blazed up and he tried to shoot Kit without fair warning—the same being "The man that draws the quickest is the man that lives the longest." But Carson proved to be the quicker of the two on the draw and Frenchy suffered a broken arm. A bullet ripped along the side of Carson's head. A few days later Shunar expired of blood-poison.

SHORTLY after, Carson married the Indian girl. They were married by the Indians' ceremony and again under the laws of the church in the year 1838. A child was born and named

Adeline. They then moved to Denver, Colorado. Then Carson was injured in a hand-to-hand fight with a panther and was reported to be dying. His wife, while ill, rode horseback one hundred miles by relays without sleep or rest to him. She saved his life, but was so weak from her efforts that she contracted illness that caused her death.

After her burial Carson said "She was a good girl. I'm glad I killed that Frenchman," which was the only man that he ever expressed satisfaction over killing.

It is not known what become of the child, Adeline. It was heard she married, after spending several years in a St. Louis convent, and went to California where she died early in life.

Of scores of stories told of Kit, the one of his Indian bride has always proved a sort of mystery to the relatives who did not drift West. Perhaps some day the truth regarding Adeline's last resting-place, her children, if any, last resting-places or their present whereabouts and other matters of interest in their lives will be cleared up and another chapter in Frontier history added. And my last chip to it that it will be *Adventure* (If solved at all) that does it.—CHAS. B. MCCAFFERTY.

BACK to our old friend the Gila Monster. Poisonous or not poisonous, he has elected himself a member of Camp-Fire and makes it a point to attend as many meetings as possible.

This letter is from one of us who knew Kit Carson and other frontiersmen. I hope he will have much to tell us about the old days in which he himself played so active a part. In particular I'd like to know just how it happened that he wasn't roasted by the Indians after being tied to that piñon tree. Won't you spin us some of the many interesting yarns you must have at your tongue's end, Comrade Banta? You are the kind of man whose words are always listened to eagerly around our Camp-Fire.

Prescott, Arizona.

My whole life has been upon the frontiers of our common country; I am now in my seventy-seventh year, and the past fifty-eight years have been spent in the Southwest—New Mexico and Arizona, but mostly in Arizona.

I HAVE lived with the Indians—not reservation vagabonds—in their native habitat; adopted into the Zuni tribe in the Spring of '66, and by the Apaches in 1869. Zuni name, Too-lush-too-loo; Apache name, Bah-dah-clishy. Had a company of sixty Navajo braves. Once tied to a piñon tree to be roasted, but wasn't, as you perceive. Knew Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, Bill Williams, Jim Beckwith, and nearly all the so-called desperados of the Southwest. Although my life has been one of adventure, I am no story writer nor romancer, but simply a relator of simple facts.

Your mid-March number, in "Camp-Fire" mentions "Adams and his lost mine." I knew Adams and he had no "lost mine." Adams was in Arizona looking for "placers" in 1859; a lode mine would have been useless to him at that time, and for quite a number of years thereafter, on account of Apaches. He had no mine in "N. W. New Mexico."

BUT no more of this dope, it is but a prelude to what I have to say, of the Gila monster.

For the information of Dr. Yarrow *et al*, I wish to say there are two species of the Gila monster. The smaller size have a solid ashen-gray color. The larger of the species, and the more venomous of the two, are colored more or less with very dark-red markings. This species is perhaps double the length of the ashen-gray reptile. Both species are very sluggish in their movements. In 1872 I caught a specimen of the reddish reptile, it was fifteen to eighteen inches in length. Dr. John C. Handy requested me to bring the reptile to the U. S. Hospital Dispensary. At the dispensary the Doctor ordered the Hospital Steward, Sidney W. Carpenter, to catch a chicken; the doctor held the fowl and the steward held a watch. The reptile seized the chicken about midway of the body, left side below the wing. Almost instantly, or within a second, after the reptile had seized the fowl, it (the chicken) began to flutter, and in five seconds thereafter the reptile loosened its hold, the chicken was dead. The doctor plucked off the feathers, and the skin showed two curved red streaks, one above and the other below. The doctor opened the skull of the dead chicken, and the brain was found to be covered with black coagulated blood, thus proving the chicken did not die of fright. Dr. Hardy pronounced its poison more deadly than the rattlesnake. That the Gila monster, of the dark-red species, is poisonous I affirm, Dr. Yarrow *et al* to the contrary notwithstanding. However, the dark-red species of the monster are not nearly so numerous as are the smaller or light colored species.—A. F. BANTA.

AN INTERESTING word from Hugh Pendexter concerning the history back of his novel in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

Few if any liberties have been taken with the historical background of "The Road to El Dorado." General Geo. A. Custer, in his "Life on the Plains," speaks much of California Joe, and says few if any knew his real name. Col. Henry Inman and Col. William F. Cody, in their "Great Salt Lake Trail," give considerable space to Joe, but are silent as to his antecedents or real name. Writing in 1897, Col. Inman says he was murdered in the Black Hills "several years ago."

IN MARCH, 1874, Gen. Custer received a long letter from him, the address being "Sierre Nevade Mountains, Calefornia." Custer had supposed him dead for some years. In the letter Joe explains, "i hev been in the rocky mountain the most of the time sence last I seen you." During his Winter campaign of 1867-68 against the Plains Indians Custer speaks of Joe as being "about forty years of age." At that time he carried "a long breech-loading Springfield musket," and "a revolver and hunting knife in his waist-belt," says Custer.

In "The Great Salt Lake Trail" Col. Cody, in speaking of a military expedition in 1864 into the Big Horn Basin in the Big Horn Mountain country, when he was chief scout and guide, tells of meeting Joe on the Great Divide of the Big Horn Mountains. He says the officers and men had all heard and read of him because of Custer's book. The date, "1864," must be wrong, for Custer's book dealt with campaigns which were made several years later. He represents Joe as being very shabbily attired, armed with an old Hawkins rifle. When the colonel asked him if he had been successful he has him say, pointing to his equipment, "This is seventy years gathering." Later on Joe tells the colonel of various experiences and mentions being at Astoria in 1816. This leaves Joe's age something of a gamble.

INMAN says he was the best all-round shot on the plains. He rode by Custer's side into the village of Black Kettle in the battle of the Washita. It is recorded that at least once Joe visited civilization, going to St. Louis and dressing in black broadcloth, with hair and beard neatly trimmed, and presenting a handsome figure of a man. But the shoes bothered him. He announced he simply desired to try the experiment, and after a few days started back for the plains and mountains. He was in Oregon and sold wood to Sheridan, then a young lieutenant in the '50's. While with Custer his partner was Jack Corbin, from whom I have drawn *Tom Reason* of this story.

FONTAINE QUI BOUILLE, or Boiling Spring River, derived its name from two mineral springs near its head at the foot of Pike's Peak. The description of gifts left at the sacred spring in this story, as well as the legend explaining the origin of the spring, is taken from the Indians' practise of leaving gifts at the Pike's Peak springs and the Indian legend explaining why those springs are bitter.

Reason's, and, in a lesser degree, *Joe's* inclination to superstitious beliefs is not over-played. Substitute "luck" and "hunch" for "medicine" and you find their parallels to-day.

The Pit River was so called because of various pits found along its course. This significance seems to have been lost by some modern cartographers and the name appears "Pitt," which has no significance.

The trick of threatening to release the small-pox spirit from a bottle was successfully tried many years before the date of my story among the Oregon Indians by either Alexander Ross, or Ross Cox. I can not remember which.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

NOW if I remember correctly, this is the very "King John" that Edgar Young once asked Camp-Fire about. Who knows any more about this mysterious character?

Albany, New York.

Just a few lines to camp-fire. I wonder if Edgar Young, who is always generously giving out information about the Andes and that region, has ever heard of a mythical (supposedly) character, an Englishman, who is the leader of a fierce tribe of Javary Indians in the interior of the Rio Negro country, and who has the whole tribe completely subdued and has them working for him, gathering rubber and actually shipping it out to Manaos and on to Para.

Mr. Friel has a tale, "The Sloth," strongly corresponding with a story told me by a youngster who was formerly in the employ of a rubber agency at Para, who heard this tale from a shipper.

IN FACT, it was Mr. Friel's tale that led me to address this inquiry. My informant states that this Englishman lives alone with the natives, but is on friendly terms with Brazilians at Manaos and other rubber towns on the Amazon. He gets his supplies direct from local sources, and has no communication with outside interests, his rubber being disposed of locally.

Perhaps Mr. Friel or Edgar Young could throw some light on this matter. The man who told me the tale states that the element of the unknown in it is that no one outside of a few planters and shippers in the interior has ever heard of him, and that very few white men have ever ventured very far into the country where he holds the reins of authority. An interesting myth, if it is such; if true, something to talk about, anyway.—G. DE H. LYON.

OF COURSE he's entitled to a button. Would be even if buttons weren't for any of you who want them.

Los Angeles, Cal.

Comrades: I have often thought I would like to write a letter to Camp-Fire, but have never felt that I was enough of an adventurer to have a place with those whose stories I have read there.

I have been a reader for a few years now, and have bought our magazine in many places from Halifax, N. S., to Vancouver, B. C., and from Dawson City, Y. T., to Los Angeles, California, also St. Johns, Newfoundland, and other ports of call.

I have never had any real-dyed-in-the-wool adventure. The most that ever happened to me was to be almost lost in a blizzard in Alaska, help to bring a neighbor up out of a ninety-five foot shaft on Bonanza Creek, at Dawson (he broke his neck falling down the shaft), and a few things like that.

OF COURSE there were a few exciting moments during the war. I served two years on a mine sweeper, and sub-chasers on the Atlantic Coast, also one year in the army. Was in Halifax harbor the morning of the explosion, having gone to the *Niobe* for sick treatment two days before. We lost 28 killed and 250 wounded from her.

Also one night we had a little time with a sub about 300 miles off Halifax. We had been with a convoy of 42 ships about 400 miles out and turned them over to an American cruiser and were on our way back to our base. We had just turned in when the bosun piped "All hands on deck; sub on the starboard bow!" We were poping off our three-pounder for some time and dropped a depth charge. Some of the fellows claim we got her because of the amount of oil that came to the top, but you can not always be sure. I hope we did, because either she or her mate sunk 20 fishing vessels on the St. Pierre Michelon Banks some weeks before that, for we had the job of bringing the fishermen into Sydney, C. B., after their boats were sunk

These and a few others like them are all that have happened to me in my wanderings, but if you think I am entitled to a button, I shall be proud to be an associate of those who belong to the good old Camp-Fire.—LAWRENCE P. TAYLOR.

P. S. If I could write like some chaps I might tell a story of a man who went with me two miles trying to get behind me with an ax, and I trying to keep him alongside or in front of me, all because I had attached the timber he had cut. I was acting for the Sheriff of the Yukon territory at the time. Say, it was funny.

HERE we are back on Wild Bill Hickok again, a doctor comrade giving us the data:

Merrick, Oklahoma.

Wild Bill Hickok. True name, James Heakok. Much has been written about this character of the Old West. Some facts, much fiction. Most of the writers, running true to form, have described him as being of heroic size, broad shouldered, deep of chest. This seems to be a trademark of heroes of fiction. In real life the hero is usually not noticeable among the ordinary crowd.

IN APRIL of this year I dropped off at Abilene, Kans., looked up a chum of past days, and asked him to direct me to an old resident who personally knew Wild Bill. He introduced me to Tom Pendergast, who referred me to J. B. Edwards, saying "He was best acquainted with Bill, and you may rely on anything he tells you." The following is from Mr. Edwards:

"Bill was 6 feet 1 inch tall, weighed usually 175 pounds, never over 180. Straight as a plumb-line, slender, small waisted, bones very small and well covered with flesh, hands long, slender and soft as a woman's, hair an auburn brown, eyes dark and unafraid, long thin mustache. Bill was a quiet man, who kept much to himself. Drank very little and never to excess. Was no part of a boaster, and was never heard to speak of but one man killed by him. A friend, named McWilliams (more of him later), was of undoubted courage, but twice laid down when drop was on him and to resist meant certain death.

BILL did not tame Abilene. (That was done by Tom Smith, the marshal who immediately preceded Bill Smith. Was killed a few miles N. E. of Abilene, where he had gone to arrest a supposedly harmless offender. He approached the door unarmed, and was shot dead.) Bill's fight in a U. P. railroad camp with the McCardless gang, he killing, in a gun-fight in the open, four of the five, was the cause of his being offered the job that Smith had so ably filled. During his stay in Abilene, about 18 months, he had little trouble. Killed two men only. One a gambler, named Cole, who ambushed him, as he came from the south town. McWilliams, a friend of Bill's, came 'running, gun in hand, to Bill's assistance. Bill said, "I just glimpsed a man with a gun, out the corner of my eye." Cross fired and killed him. He killed Cole with the next shot.

He soon left Abilene, served as marshal of Hays City, 40 miles west of Abilene. For a year then passed from the ken of Abilene people.

TEN days after talking with Mr. Edwards, I saw Mr. James Bryant, of Wathera, Kansas, who had charge of the loading-pens at Abilene. These pens were built by J. O. McCoy of Springfield, Mo., for the shipping of those vast herds that had been grazed up, up, and up, through Texas and Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, to the rail-end of Abilene. Word for word almost he told me as had Mr. Edwards. He did not know, nor does he yet, that I had seen Edwards.

Tom Pendergast, before mentioned, stood just back of Bill when killed. He said no reason for killing was known, except a "drunken camp hanger-on sought notoriety."

Can any man who has met and known men look on this photo and say, "Here is a boaster, and a braggart?" I leave it up to the boys of the Camp-Fire.—F. K. WILLIS.

IN READING what L. Patrick Greene says below about his story in this issue it struck me as strange that we have heard so little in our magazine—stories or Camp-Fire—about diamonds. And other precious stones, for that matter. I'm not particularly interested in gems myself, but in such a magazine as ours a fellow would think we'd hear a good deal about them. I'm not counting the ruby eye of an idol and that kind of thing, nor stories about thefts of jewels. Was thinking, rather, of gems in their "native lair," or even as treasure-trove or pirate treasure. Hold on, writers! I'm not hinting for stories along these lines. Just wondering. The fact that we haven't heard more about them tends to show that our general interest in them is not particularly keen. Yet jewels and adventure seem pretty close akin.

Anyhow, Mr. Greene's story stands on its own feet.

Cliff Island, Maine.

An article in *The Century Magazine* by George Frederick Kunz gave me an idea for the story. I quote from his article of the finding of the world's greatest diamond, the Cullinan diamond.

THE day's work at the mine was over and Mr. F. Wells the surface manager, was making his usual rounds. Glancing along one side of the deep excavation, his eye suddenly caught the gleam of a brilliant object far up on the bank. He lost no time in climbing up to the spot where he had noted the glint of light. He had not been mistaken: it was really a brilliant crystal. He tried to pull it out with his fingers, and as this proved impossible, he sought to pry it out with the blade of his knife. To his surprise, the knife blade broke without causing the stone to yield. Confident now that the crystal must be a very large one, he dug out the earth around it, thinking for the moment that, contrary to all experience in the mine, the stone might be attached to a piece of the primitive rock. When he discovered that this was not the case he began to doubt that the object was really a diamond. He said afterward:

"'When I took a good look at the stone stuck there in the side of the pit it suddenly flashed across me that I had gone insane—that the whole thing was imaginary. All at once another solution dawned on me. The boys often play jokes on one another. Some practical joker, thought I, has planted this huge chunk of glass here for me to find. He thinks I will make a fool of myself by bringing it into the office in a great state of excitement, and the story will be told far and wide in South Africa.'

"Determined to test the stone on the spot, before proceeding further, Wells rubbed off the dirt from one of its faces with his finger, and soon convinced himself that it was not a lump of glass, but a diamond crystal, apparently of exceptional whiteness and purity. With the aid of a larger blade of his knife, he finally succeeded in prying out the stone, and bore it away with him to the office of the mine. Here it was cleaned and, to the astonishment of all, was found to weigh more than three times that of any other diamond that has been discovered."

SIR WILLIAM CROOKES in a letter to Mr. Kunz, the author of the article said, in part:

"The diamond is a fragment, probably less than half, of a distorted octahedral crystal, the other portions waiting to be discovered by some fortunate miner."

This stone was sent to England, a gift from South Africa to King Edward, by mail. It was insured for the sum of $1,250,000.

King Edward said, when the diamond was shown to him—

"This is a great curiosity; but I should have kicked it aside as a lump of glass if I had seen it in the road."

"IN ORDER to divide the great crystal," again I quote from the article, "it was necessary to discover the exact situation of what are known as the lines of cleavage; for there is a grain in the diamond crystal which may be compared with the grain in a piece of wood, and although the diamond is the hardest substance known to us, a well directed blow, the force of which passes along one of these cleavage planes, will split the crystal with comparative care and ease."

There is much more that could be said, for the story of this great diamond reads like a romance, but perhaps I have already quoted enough of Mr. Kunz's article: enough at any rate to prove that there are no flagrant impossibilities in "Lines Of Cleavage."—L. PATRICK GREENE.

SHE oughtn't to be sore at me. I've said lots of times that anybody is entitled to one of our Camp-Fire buttons, and surely a lady is somebody. And we've always had a very particular welcome to Camp-Fire for all those of the gentler sex who belong with us in spirit and very often in accomplishment.

Columbus, Georgia.

I am sore at you. Although I don't know if it's your fault or not. Some time ago you said something in the "Camp-Fire" about the Camp-Fire buttons, but you did not say anything about whether a lady was entitled to wear one. Now Mr. Editor, there are just as many ladies who admire the Camp-Fire as there are men. I for one have been a reader since it was first organized.

I have acquired an intense desire for one of those buttons and I want you to please publish in the "Camp-Fire" if a lady can wear one of those buttons. I know there are some more ladies will back me up in this matter.—MARGARET H. JENKINS.

FROM D. WIGGINS comes a copy of an old poem interestingly connected with the Minnesota Massacre:

Salem, Oregon.

In going over my back files a day or so since, I found the original copy of the enclosed verse, and thought you might like to look over them. If you published them in the Camp-Fire, some one of the readers, even Uncle Frank or Mr. Harriman, might be able to substantiate the tale.

The story was related to me as follows: In the Minnesota Massacre a great many people were killed at a distance from their homes, or in such places as forbade the immediate recovery of their bodies. The poem was found in a little cave beneath a small waterfall, and in the cave were the bones of a man. Who was the author, and whether he was the owner of the bones, is one of the mysteries of the Frontier.

The donor of the poem was a spectator to the hanging, at Mankato, of the twenty-eight Sioux on one gallows, at the same time. Here it is.

Minnehaha (Laughing Water).

Minnehaha, Laughing Water, cease thy laughing now, for Ah,
Listen while a maniac wanderer, sighs to thee his woeful tale.
See yon smoke, there was my dwelling, that is all I have of home.
Hark, I hear their feindish yelling, as I houseless, childless, roam.
Yonder is my newbought reaper, standing mid the ripening grain.
And my cow asks why I leave her, wandering unmilked o'er the plain.
Oh my daughter, Jenny darling, worse than Death was Jenny's fate.
Nelson, as the troops were leaving, turned and closed the garden gate.
Did they kill my Hans and Oly, did they find them in the corn?
Go and tell the savage monster not to kill my youngest born.
Give me back my Kela's tresses, let me kiss them once again.
She who blessed me with caresses lies unburied on the plain.
Faithful Fido, thou they left me; can you tell me, Fidy, why,
God has thus at once bereft me? All I ask is here to die.
Change thy notes, gay Minnehaha, let prevail some sadder strain;
Whilst thou'rt dancing in the sunlight, corpses mangled strew the plain.

I have tried to give the original spelling, as nearly as possible. Don't have the least idea as to the author, but the tales was told as I have given it to you.

Here's how.—D. WIGGINS.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: Back issues of *Adventure* from the beginning of 1918. State price before sending. Address RUTH BROWN, Room 222, 30 Huntington Ave., Boston, Mass.

WILL BUY: July and October, 1915. Fifty cents each.—Address W. TOWNEND, care of The Service Bureau, 39 Brompton Road, London, S. W. 3, England.

Expeditions and Employment

[illegible]e we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding adress for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

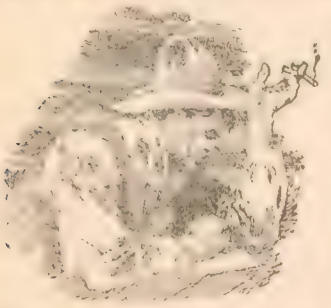
Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask *Adventure*," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask *Adventure*" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1305 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 West Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Hunting, fishing, travel, Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Melbourne Beach, Florida. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 20 Ashland Blvd., Chicago. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern: Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, 381 Broadway Street, San Francisco, Cal. Covering Lower California and that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce, business and general conditions.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont. Covering southeastern Ontario and the Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery..

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

32. Africa Part 5. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN. The Adventurers' Club, 8 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

33. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

34. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask *Adventure*" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for cataleg of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

Lost Mines

ADVICE for hunters of 'em—work for day's wages:

Question:—"I am going into the mountains of Texas this Winter to prospect for gold and minerals, and also trap. Have you any information of lost mines in Texas? Have heard there were some.

What kind of an outfit would you advise for a stay of all Winter? Traps and guns: Being a resident would we need license? And have we a right to prospect on any land under fence? Please don't mention name in *Adventure*."— —— ——, Sipes Springs, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—Your letter received this morning and I will say in answer that trapping, hunting, and prospecting for minerals are all right to pass away time for pleasure, but as a livelihood it would not be much of a success during these days of high prices.

There are several lost mines that have been talked about a great deal but as to the reliability of such reports I can not say. I have not seen any one that has had success in finding one, although I have known several of my friends to make the attempt. In one of the mountains of Lampasas County there is said to be one that is very rich—15 jack loads of gold was thrown back into the shaft of the mine when a band of Indians attacked the miners and drivers, who were Spaniards. The shaft was then concealed by boulders and small rocks to keep the Indians from finding it.

In the fight that followed all of the miners were killed except one, who made his escape and made a map of the mine and location. He went back in later days but was not able to find the place. The mountain is on a ranch and fenced in. The owner will not allow any more digging on the land, for some have dug deep holes and stock fall into them.

On the Colorado not far from Llano there is said to be another mine that is lost. In the southwestern counties that border on the Rio Grande there are several mines that are looked for every year, but none have been found that I know about. I can not vouch for the truth of any of these mines.

You would have to get the permission of the owners of land that you wish to prospect on if the land was under fence. That ought not to be a hard thing to do though.

A high-power rifle—.30-30 or some other such caliber—for big game; a 12-gage double-barrel shotgun for ducks, turkeys, geese, quail, squirrels, and other small stuff; as for the traps wait until you arrive at your destination and then find out the size of the animals in that vicinity. There is no use in loading yourself down with a lot of traps that may not be of use to you. You will be able to get traps in nearly all hardware stores or in general mercantile stores in all parts of the country.

Take a small pick, a tap hammer, a small shovel, a woodsman's hand ax—you will need these in prospecting—some woolen army blankets, woolen socks and shirts, extra shoes, two shelter halves to keep out the rain and the cold, extra pants, leather leggings, a strong pocket knife to use in skinning, forks, spoons, tin plates and cups, frying-pan or skillet, coffee-pot, a water-proof match-case, and if you can find a pack carrier like we used in the army it will be the very thing that you need to carry all the above in.

All of the above can be rolled into a pack that can easily be carried on your back. The above will be about all that you need so there is no use in taking a trunk or several suit-cases full of things with you.

I believe that I have covered all of your questions. If there is anything else that you want to know about my territory, I'll be glad to give you the best that I have.

Pearl-Fishing

IT'S fascinating work to talk about—but how many people do you know who got to be millionaires working at it?

Question:—"I would like to ask in regard to pearl-fishing. What is the best way to hunt them? Where I live here (on Caddo Lake) the water is shallow; the deepest parts are only ten or twelve feet. There are lots of shells here but few pearls, so the shells would prove a greater compensation than the pearls, so I would like to know where I could find a market for the shells.

Would like to know if a diving-suit could be used without an air-pump in that shallow water—ten or twelve feet. Please give me the address of some company that makes diving-suits; also the address of the nearest pearl and shell buyers, to where I live."—W. M. MARSHALL, Oil City, La.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Some of best pearls found were in Caddo Lake a few years ago. Write *Fur News*, 71 W. 23d St., New York City, for price-list of their books—"Pearls and Pearling," one you want.

Diving-suits are used in Indiana and Illinois. Write Fisheries Commission, Washington, D. C., for information about shells, pearls and their markets. They'll send you a number of pamphlets. Mention Louisiana and Texas.

Shells are high-priced, and you should be able to market some of the shells there, though southern pearls are not so good as northern of same weight. Shells, I think, are about same price.

Bait for the Muskys

EVEN at the risk of being called a sentimental fool, I personally am for using artificial bait for fly-fishing every time it will catch the fish that natural bait will get:

Question:—"Please oblige me with all the information you have on hand, on fresh-water fishing in New York State (upper part) and the Thousand Islands and neighboring lakes.

Following are a few questions I would like to have information about:

1. Best live bait for muskellunge.
2. Best artificial bait for muskellunge.
3. Which is best here, live or artificial bait?
4. Best bait for pickerel, pike, bass, both artificial and live.
5. What kind of an assortment of tackle must I have?
6. The best camping outfit for traveling by automobile.
7. If I put up each night in a hotel on the trip up, and stay in a hotel while up there for five or six days, what will the expenses amount to (roughly estimating it)?

8. If I decided to go on through Canada and go West, intending to cross back into the States, around Michigan or a neighboring State, what will my route be?

How will I do it? By ferry over some narrow part of the Great Lakes; or do I have to go completely around them?"—CHAS. A. GERHARD, Caldwell, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—Find following replies to your letter.

1. Black sucker minnows.

2. Musk-Oreno, Hildebrandt spinners with bucktail trailer, any of the large artificial minnows resembling a black sucker, or in fact any kind that s an underwater lure.

3. Artificial bait.

4. Small shiner minnows and those mentioned in No. 2 of small and medium size.

5. Bait-casting rod five feet, line testing 18 pounds or over for muskys, and from 14 to 16 pounds for the others, and a good quality quadruple multiplying reel.

6. Auto Camp Bed outfit.

7. Hotel and meals about six dollars per day.

8. Cross into Michigan so you will hit into about the Sault and you will run into fine fishing all over. Cross on steamer. Look at map and see the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The Nipigon Region

THOSE who plan a trapping-trip, either to Nipigon or elsewhere, would do well to note that lower prices for both raw furs and the finished product are predicted—if indeed they are not already with us by the time this item reaches your eyes:

Question:—"Would like very much to secure information concerning canoe routes in the Nipigon region. To what governmental department should I write for maps? Or is it possible to obtain these elsewhere? Have trapped the Tobique in New Brunswick and have wandered quite a lot through the Porcupine district, Abitibi Lake country and down along the T. & N. O.

It is my intention to trap in the vicinity of the Nipigon or farther north this Winter; but my ideas of the country are rather hazy. Is its topography similar to the region about the Redwater Lakes?

Please give me information as to the best jumping-off places. Am traveling by canoe about the first of October. Want to get away beyond the settlements and lumber-camps."—MURRAY O'NEIL, Radio Operator, Steamship *Banicaa*, care of Gulf Line, New York, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Write Mr. J. E. Chalifour, Chief Geographer, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Ontario, for maps. Also the Hudson's Bay Company or William McKirdy & Sons, both at Nipigon Station (C. P. R.) may be able to supply you with local detail maps of the district.

You have been through the Porcupine district? All right; just add as many again lakes and streams, and a few millions more rocks, and you have the Nipigon district. Rocks and water and trees, world without end! That's it.

Thunder Bay district used to be good trapping-ground, and it should be still. But I would advise you to write to some one on the ground there now before you start. A letter to the manager of the Hudson's Bay post or the gentlemen mentioned above would bring you a satisfactory answer, I believe. You see, the Nipigon is protected, as far as fishing is concerned, by the Provincial government, and there may be other restrictions in force—especially for non-residents.

Now you say you are traveling by canoe. From where? If you paddle the Bay you will have the Nipigon River to negotiate before you enter the lake, a paddle of about forty miles, with nine portages. But if you put your canoe into the water at Ferland (Grand Trunk Pacific Railway) you will be right on the spot—north end of the lake. After that it's up to you. Before you you have hundreds of miles of shore-line and innumerable streams to pick on.

The best "jumping-off place," were I in your place, would be Ferland. For best results keep to the west shore of the lake.

Local maps, obtainable on the ground, will give you canoe routes. Personally I have been over only one, the Nipigon River. Again, there are the services of Indian and breed guides always waiting for you.

"Shotgun" Pistols

A PISTOL which shoots either shot or ball? Certainly:

Question:—"I have been credibly informed that there is a one-barrel pistol manufactured and sold by some arms company—which, informant says he has no knowledge, but knows there is such a pistol—that shoots only shot in cartridges, can use same cartridges as are used in common shotguns and are loaded into the pistol as into shotguns, in the breech—of course only one cartridge can be shot at a time—not confined to one certain kind of cartridge but can use the various sizes used in common shotguns. Is this a fact or is my informant romancing? If all O. K. tell me where the pistol can be procured and at what price."—ARTHUR C. EVERETT, Honolulu, T. H.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—There is such a pistol made; you will find it illustrated in Major Pollard's book "Pistols," with a brief description of its work. If you have not the book perhaps the following will be of use.

The pistol is a common tip-up weapon, chambered for the .410 shell and using either shot or solid ball loadings. It is loaded as in the regular type of weapon, and is of the style known as a side lever. It is stated as being good for about twenty yards.

I do not know by whom it is made, but suspect that the Birmingham Small Arms Company, of Birmingham, England, can supply them; prices I do not know, as I have never seen one. A good many continental arms makers furnish these pistols to order, I understand.

The Stevens firm once made a pistol for shot, and which was bored and chambered for the .40-63 Remington straight shell. One is in this locality, and does good work for thirty yards on small game; a duck is about its limit, however. I never saw another, and they are no longer made.

But you might get a Colt or Smith & Wesson revolver for the .44 W. C. F. shell, and have the barrel smooth-bored to use the .44-shot shell in it, with good results at very short range.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HESTVAN, CASTEREA (HARRY CLARK). I need you badly. Please write at once. Remember N. H. G. Michigan and Oklahoma? Your old pal.—Address R. D. D. Box 79, Clearmont, Mo.

LEWIS, EVELYN A. Missing for five years. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. LEWIS, 3545 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill.

GREELY, PEARL ADAM. Age seventeen years. Disappeared from his home at Hoquiam, Wash., last November. Height five feet six inches, blue eyes, dark brown curly hair, weighs about 145 pounds, and has three-cornered scar on outside of left wrist, also a scar an inch long on back of head. Any one knowing of his present whereabouts please write his sister.—Address MISS ESTHER GREELY, 309 L. St., Hoquiam, Wash.

A. E. S. Dear Sister. Your letter received. Was glad to hear from you. I have been almost out of my mind with worry and anxiety. I wrote to you the 30th of August, and sent it to William G. to be forwarded to you, but guess he failed to do so. Write me again. Am going to take a vacation soon. Am nervous and ill. Will always love you. Your heart-broken mother. C. S., 921 Park Ave., Hoboken, N. J.

COOKE, MAGGIE. Wants to locate all comfort friends who wrote her in 1911-1912-1913. Especially Lena Montague, of Phila., Pa., and Mabel Dennison, of Wisconsin. Also Elizabeth Stiles of Three Rivers, Texas. She wants all the C. L. O. C. to order her books and songs as she is still helpless; fourteen years since she sat up in bed. She is a member of Camp-Fire and loves *Adventure.*—Address P. O. Box 145, Upton Sta., Pittsburg, Pa.

HAYES, JOHN M. (Monty) of Portland, Oregon. Shipmate on board *Pactolas.* 1897 voyage, N. Y. to Shanghai and Manila and back to New York. Tom would like to hear from you. Write me. T. S. W., care of *Adventure.*

JONES, HOMER. Last heard of in Vicksburg, Miss., leaving for Memphis, Tenn., in 1916. Any information as to his whereabouts please address (Daughter) MRS. FLORENCE NORRIS, 712 McGee St., Kansas City, Mo.

REDNER, WILLIAM MORRELL. Last heard of going to Helena, Mont., on way to his home in Seattle. Is about five feet, seven inches tall, light complexion, and getting somewhat bald just above forehead. Belonged to 27th Field Artillery and carried discharge papers with him. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. E. E. REDNER, 5422 Barnes Ave., Seattle, Wash.

PEMIMAN, JANE. Widow of Beryman Pemiman, who lived at 503 West 23rd St., New York, N. Y., in 1865. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY JOHNSON, Warsaw, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HAMMONS, ALBERT. From Oklahoma. Enlisted in U. S. Navy in 1913. Was a sailor on the U. S. S. *Kansas* from 1913 to 1917. Last heard from on board U. S. S. *Elcano,* Manila. P. I., in the Summer of 1918. "Oakey" please communicate with your old pal "Red" of the "Big 4" days. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with W. A. SNEDDON, Knightsville, Ind.

LOVERS, JIMMY and COOPER, H. LESLIE. Write BERNARD F. KRALL, care of *Adventure.*

MILLER, HARRY. Of Illinois. Left Tacoma, Washington, on the four-masted schooner *William Nottingham,* bound for Durban, South Africa where we were paid off and joined the South African Artillery. Last seen in Le Havre, France. Would like to hear from him.—Address EDWIN ANGELL, 287 Hanover St., Boston, Mass.

KEYES, FAYETTE E. Last heard of at 406 Northwood Ave., Columbus, Ohio, in 1917. May be in Canada now as he lived there before. Write your old pal and roommate at H. M. I. in 1915.—DONALD R. DAVIS, 185—21st St., Milwaukee, Wis.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR, GALBREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; H. E. Copp; J. E. Warner; Sinn Cardie; C. E. Wilson; T. T. Bennett; L. E. Patten; James Mosse; R. W. Kimsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Palowe.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Beaton, Sgt. Major G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Chisholm, D. F. R.; Cleve, Jim; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Curtiss, D. A.; Eager, Paul Roman; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raphelson, Sampson; Rich, Wagoner, Bob; Rinkenback, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Saloway, Jack M.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Williams, W. P.; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; L. T. 348; S. 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure.*

THE following have been inquired for in either the First Januuary or Mid-January issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ASTOR, Miss Mattie; Baker, Wm.; Bassett, Frank A.; Blackburn, George W.; Bragg, William H.; Campbell; Cantero, Marcelo A.; Vincente, Rennulfo E.; Carpenter, Elmer; Cheney, E. H.; Cheney, S. H.; Cohen, Jacob; Cunningham, Juliet; Diven, David Ward; Farrell, Howard "Duke"; Farrell, Joseph P.; Fredericks, Erick; Gray, Gene; Herbert, Sidney; Jack; Jones, Frank; Kench, Frank; Lanahan, Bob "Digger"; Loonie; Luca, Dimagio; MacKenzie, William J.; Meyers, O. H.; Parker, Carl M.; Reed, Forrest B.; Rupert, Joseph; Sims, Wayne J.; Stalker, James; Story, Capt, Sydney, S.; Tribble, Ralph; Walker, Sailor Fred; Webster, E. M.; Weekes, George Leslie or Eddie Lewis; Wheat, Mrs. Lula; Wilson, Earl D.

MISCELLANEOUS—Descendant of Ezekiel Hopkins. Former members of 269th Aero Squadron; Tibbets; Martelle A. (Rifleman) Hodgson, Joseph (Cook) or any one who remembers Pvt. Percy Laidlaw (night cook) 1st Royal Quebec Regt.

THE following names have been inquired for within the past two years. The name of the inquirer can be obtained from this magazine.

ALLAN, Hughie V.; Aleliunas, Alex; Albert, Vivian; Adams, Newburn; Ahearn, Arthur; Allen, Jerome; Anderson, William Hamilton; Anderson, Carl or Charles; Ambrose, Chris; Arnstein, Joseph; Anderson, Nelson Miles; Anderson, Charles W.; Anna, M. W.; Austell, Percy W.; Atkins, Warren; Atkins, Walter J.; Ayles, Leon W. and Tessie; Atkins, W. F. L.; Ayton, Tom; Ashton, Robert Newton; Austin, L. C.; Baker, R. W.; Baker, M. Lena; Ballard, Dave; Barber, Miss Pearl; Bareda, St. Revato; Barker, Horace; Bartlett, Geo. H.; Bastia, Clifford S.; Ball, Charles Frederick; Baker, William H.; Baughman, Guy; Barker, Donald; Bateman, Luke; Bastian, Walter; Bass, Edgar Lee; Barron, J. E.; Bergstrom, Albin; Beyrsdoffer, A.; Berman, Herman A.; Bennett, Joseph; Beck, Mrs. Bessie; Behrens, E. A.; Beasley, Tom H.; Beaton, Sergt. Major Gordon M.; Belknap, Earl; Beaubier, Jerry E.; Belcher, Ralph; Beavers, Frank E.; Bellows, Fred L.; Bergman, Fred; Bentley, Milton Reynolds; Bjerkander, Henry; Bird, Rhodora; Blitz or Bliss, Joe; Biechele, Harry; Bickford, P.; Black, Donald; Boarders, Sgt.; Bohinz, Jack; Bowman, Clarence L.; Bohler, Eddie L.; Bosworth, Emma L.; Bradt, Charles Edwin; Brackett, Everett W.; Breese, Lieut. Sidney V. C.; Brice, Edward Clifton; Brandle, Paul; Brown, Clayton; Brown, Grace Florence; Brockman, C. A.; Brown, W. R., Brown, R. H.; Brooke, James Henry; Brownell, Herman A.; Brown, Carl; Burlett, Sgt. Major; Bunker, Earl R.; Butler, Jack Ormonde; Bunch, Ray; Butler, Harry; Bundy, Ellis; Burdick, Daniel Henry; Buchanan, Charles; Bushnell, Lucius Hamilton; Byars, Alexander Terry; Caxter, Charles B.; Clementson, Anton; Claiborne, Harry E.; Carlson, Nels; Calab, Susanna; Cansler, Clyde; Campbell, James W.; Campbell, Duncan; Carroll, Sgt. Martin; Caslin, Jack; Campbell, Jenner S.; Carson, James; Carpenter; Campbell, M. V.; Callaha, Morris; Calamia, James A.; Classant, Henri de; Clarke, James; Clayton, George; Clochesy, William; Clifton, Mrs. Harry; Clayton, Frank; Clancy, R. L.; Chandler, Frank Charley; Chapman, Charles; Clark, Charley; Clingham, Charles; Chesworth, Thomas; Cleveland, George C.; Christianson, Chris; Clegg, Arthur; Coe, C. A.; Coates, Frank; Collins, Michael James; Cohen, Jacob; Colfar, Annie; Coghill, Ion D.; Cole, Mr. and Mrs.; Coate, Tom; Conkle, Clarence; Conners, Will F. W.; Cooke, Harry Malcolm; Conant, Herman Jennie B.; Conant, Harold Beecher; Conant, William Heywood; Cosses, M. Angie; Coonerty, M. C.; Cooper, Ted; Costello, Jack; Connor, Maggie; Conde, James Bache; Covington, Wm. G.; Copley, Clarence L.; Corkwort, Clan; Coutant, Fred I.; Coombs, Peggie; Cuthbert, Clarence; Crossey, Wm.; Curran, Hugh; Curran, John; Cirdland, Arthur; Curry, Jas. F.; Dalton, George; Davis, Fredie; Davis, Jack; Danch, Mrs. Mary; Darrow, Lionel; Carlington, James B.; D'Arcy, Mike; Davis, Sgt. Wm.; Dempsey, Raymond S.; Devine, Dan; Dewal, Jack E., Jr.; Decker, Edward L.; Denniston, Thos. Greer; Denning, Leslie G.; Denning, W. Charles Myson; De Lapp, Will E.; Dempsey, Howard; De Lisle, Frank A. De Haven, Wm. Stringer; D'Errico, Louis; Dixon, Robert; L.; Dorks, Miss Barbara; Dik; Dietz, Mrs. Will; Dickinson, C. L.; Dickey, Hubert; Divers, John Sterling; Dieterick, Martin M.; Dorians, Mildred; Dominick, Mac.; Dorais, A.R.; Dutch Mack; Doyle, John; Doyle, Michael; Driscoll, John Joseph; Donnegan, Charlie; Douthwright, Frederick and William; Dooley, Vincent De Paul: Downey, Harry Evans; Ducette, Hector; Duncan, George R.; Duncan, Flossie; Duringer, Allan O.; Duncan, Ed and Ellis; Dunn, Arthur A.; Dyhsma, Bartles; Egan, D. Jack; Earle, William F.; Earl, John Ernest; Echols, Lon; Elliot, Robert; Elliott, Richard Lillicoe; Eklund, Nellie De Cloud; Eastman, Edward J.; Ed Bonny, or Red; Enquist, Clarence; Estvan, Joseph; Everding, Alfred; Farley, "Rush"; Falusi, Joseph; Farren, Harry F.; Felingham, Fred L.; Fairbanks, Luther S.; Floch, Forrest Thurman; Ferris, John and James; Fitch, Leslie H.; Fisher, Elmer; Filbert, Fred; Fletcher, R. A.; Flagg, Melvin L.; Flattery, Michael A.; Fiedler, or Bany, Edward; Firman, Kenton W.; Fishman, Mrs. Rose; Fishman, Elizabeth and Fannie; Flounders, Lillie; Fiedler, Joe; Foose, James O.; Foley, Peter; Foley, C. W.; Forsyth, Thomas; Fribert, Fread; Francis, J. F.; Gates, Walter C.; Gallaway, Karl H.; Gale, David J.; Gaskill, L. B.; Gardner, James E.; Gillett, Frank M.; Gibbs, Richard H.; Gehe, Pvt. David W.; Given, John; Gilly, Thomas; Gibbs; Giseler, Barney; Glauman, Al; Greeves, J. Gardner; Graham, Mrs. Annie; Greely, Pearl Adam; Green, James; Grasmé, Erwin; Gross, Marlea; Griffith, Charlie E.; Hackett, Clyde O.; Hall, Will G. E.; Hall, Florence; Hall, Charles and Henrietta; Harrison, William; Harris, Fred; Hannold, Henry F.; Hart, Jack; Hartwig, George H.; Hart, Harry Lee; Harris, Joe; Harding, Dick; Hannah, G. M.; Hansen, Einar; Hartnett, Jack; Haydon, Dewey; Hayes, Arthur Joseph; Hayes, Frank F.; Hurley, James; Hamner or Hammer, Lulu V.; Heliman, Wm.; Heddelson, Thomas; Heffernan, Otto A.; Hendricks, E. Sylvester; Heywood, Walter; Herred, William; Hewke, Manda; Hester, Clifford E.; Hess, E. B.; Hickock, Parke; Hill, Ernie C.; Hoffner, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick; Holmes, Norman L.; Holder, Charles Henry; Hoffman, Wm.; Hoey, Pat.; Houdyshelt, Jasper E.; Houghton, Frank Wentworth; Houraham, John C.; Hook, Mrs. Mary; Hoskins, Frank; Howard, R. L.; Howe, Roger Willoughby; Hornstein, Samuel; Howell, Ed.; Hooper, William H.; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Wm. P.; Hunt, Charles; Hugh; Hurlbut, William; Hylaman, Joe; Inge, Jim; Irving, H.; Izat, John; Innes Richard and James; J. A. B or B. R. T.; Japenga, Jacon Orie; Jenks, Frank E.; Jeffries, Charles D.; Jennings, Floyd; Johnson, Sam H.; Johnson, J. H.; Johnson, A. L. or L. A.; Joyut, Harry; Jones, Drumm, Charles O.; Jones, Edward H.; Jones, Ralph; Jones, Stanley M.; Johnson, Louis; Kade, Ray T.; Kelly, Thomas Francis; Kelly, Robert E.; Kenner, Alfred W.; Keith, Joyce; Kelley, Wynnie; Kelly, Robert E.; Kemp, John Crawley; Keaser, Jacob; Keller, Bryon Loring; Kennedy, James T.; Keith, William; Kellam, H. S. & Charlie; Keney, George A.; Kennedy, Bill; King, Vance Herold; King, William Benedell; King, G. E.; King, Sergt. F. W.; Kirby, Willie Holbert; Kirk, Howard; Kilgore, Y. J.; Kircher, Hugo H.; Kieth, John M.; Kierstead, James Amos; Kline, Sergt. Onie F.; Knotte, Maxmillan Louis; Klinger, Irving; Knowles, Edward; Klubertanz Capt. Ferdinand A.; Klemerman, Max; Kohn, Pvt. Wm.; Kuffer, or Keller; Kuller, Harry; Kruger, Henry; Kyle, Wesley or Gordon; Kromer, Raymond; Kroh, H. D.; Langford, George Washington; Laing, Harry; L. S. F.; Law, Francis Gordon; Lamie, James; La Pierre, James; La Velle, Miss Billie or Beatrice; Larity, Albert; Lawien, Wm. J.; Latimer, Rev.; Law, Merton Edward; Lawton, James; Ledingham, John; Lee, Delbert C.; Leeman, George W.; Lee, D. F.; Lenntag, Harry Gollander; Lentz, Geo. Thos.; Love, Mrs. Marie, Violet and Daisy; Loudon, Hall; Lindrot, Alexander; Lockwood, Charles N.; Lorck, Edward; Lowey, Daniel; Light, Daniel F.; Lonacre, Miss Florence; Linn, Ayrus H.; Lilly, W. A.; Lynch, Miss Barbara; Lyon, Henry; Luntze, Alfred; Lucas, Mrs. Jo; Lucas, Jo; Lynch, Eddie; Lyon, C. W. Jr., or Gladwyn; McCormack, L.; McGovern, John; McColl, John B.; McDonald, James; McGrath, Pvt. Thos. Edward; McFadden, Paul; McClarty, James; McGuire, Amos and Willis; McCormick, Thomas C.; McBride, Robt. E.; McCoy, George; McDermott, Mrs. Chrystal; McDonough, Roderick; McMurry, Mrs.; McMahon, Michael; McNealy, Louise; McNealy, Edgar; McWilliams, Walter; Malone, Dan C.; Mack; Miller, Orville Edward; Miller, Peter; Morris, William Jr.; Maguire, George; MacCracken, John Alcorn; Magill, Robert; Mac; MacIntyre, Earl; Manman, Mrs. Al or Lenna; Maloney, Jane; Magee, Rupert; Martel, Leon H.; Martin, Abraham; Marshall, Bert W.; Martin, Walter; Marchmonte, Merle; Marchant F.; Mathews, Louis P.; Maxwell, Howard S.; Maret, John T.; Masters, Owen Joel; Massby, Samuel Settle; Meggison, John B.; Mead, Joseph T.; Meyer, Lidia and Gottlieb; Meadows, Julian H.; Mercer, Homer J.; Michael, James; Mills, Joseph; Mills, Frank B.; Miller, Dick; Mills, Lynden; Mohan, Art; Monroe C.; Morrow, Thomas; Moran, Thomas or Michael; Morningstar, Richard; Moss, Corpl. Bruce D.; Morrison, Moore, Frank Kenny K.; Morre, William; Murphy, Floyd; Mullin, Michael; Murphy, Dan; Munn, John Clancey; Murphy, Jesse T.; Myers, Jack; Myers, James G.; Nein, Wm.; Meiger, B.; Nance, I. V.; Nelson, Olla; Nichols, Frank Butler; Noras, John; Newland, John Wesley;

Nuckles, Fritz; Nulph, Stewart; Olson, Hjalmar; Ohlson, O. S.; O'Hara, Earl Wm.; Ogg, Linwood, C.; Orman; Parker, Jos. S.; Paffmann George; Parker, Charles A.; Parker, John R.; Parrott, Thos D.; Parker; Page, Arthur A.; Parke, Hicok; Parker, Gus; Painter, Frank B.; Parker, Donald W.; Pentacoff, Sgt. Charles W.; Peoples, Chas.; Perry, Jim; Perla, Carl; Perras, Clement; Peppard, Gerald A.; Perkins, Chas.; Phillips, Orestes, C.; Powell, Malcolm; Pollen, James; Pleasant, Mr. or Mrs. Karl; Philip, Frank; Phillips, Warren J.; Phillipson, David; Porterfield, Wellington or Kelly William; Pleasants, Robert T.; Powers, Jim; Porter, Mel; Philpott, George Victor; Phillips, Duke and Kaddie; Pratt, George B.; Prescott, Quinby, James; Price, George "Slim"; Prime, Mort; Reichmeier, John C.; Rahal, Joe; Reeves, Wallace; Russell, William Thomas; Reed, Elswine E. or Geo. C.; Reeser, Albert E.; Ramey, Dewey; Ray, James Richard; Rains, Mrs. Dave; Rogers Charles; Raymond and Eddie; Ringenburg, Lester; Robinson, William; Robbe, Perry; Robinson, Richard Frederick; Robinson, Ian; Roberts, Ora Frank; Robel, James F.; Rosinoff, Samuel; Ross, John K.; Roup, R. A.; Rose, Jack; Roycroft, Sydney Lynn; Roycroft, Lloyd C.; Rohrick, Arthur; Rounsley, Charley D.; Rohrbeck, Frank W.; Rowe, Glen S.; Rozenthal, Sli n; Rutherford, Wm.; Rubenstein, Meyer; Rubenstein, Harry; Russell, John L.; Russell, Wm. Jefferson; Sayers, Robert E.; Santry, Denis; Saxon, Walter Percy; Sage, Ollie E.; Schelp, Roy E.; Schafhausen, Leo J.; Schroeder, Paul; Scott, Harry; Schwartz, Barney; Schultz, William; Schatswell, Richard C.; Shaw, Sylvester Elmer; Shepherd, Guy M.; Sheldon, Willis D.; Seay, Philip; Sheldon, Willis D.; Seibert, Charles E.; St. Amond, Marcel; Schreiber, Carl; Storey, Albert; Shaw, Corp. A. W.; Sholler, Mrs. C.; Sheets, Robert; Silk, William J.; Sjogren, Gus; Sims, Elsworth; Skinner, Wm. B.; Slippery Slim; Siegfried, Otto; Simpson, Miles; Smith, Forman; Smith, Dr. Hulbert S.; Smith, Bantam Red; Smith, William; Smith, Paul J.; Smolinsky, Louis; Smith, Geo. W.; Smoky Pete; South Africans; Scontupe, Sam; Spellit, L.; Stone, George Laurie; Spiers, John; Stiner, N. G.; Streetzel, Fred; Spalding, Joseph Warren; Stevens, Charles; Stout, Capt. A.; Stove, Eleanor K.; Stover, Jack; Stokes, Vincent Walter; Stevenson, Alex; Stone, Nallie Russell; Stiegler, Bernhardt; Sterling, William; Staedtler, Emil; Sweeck, Joseph E.; Raylor, Alfred; Tainton, Blair A.; Tebow, Ralph E.; Texas Slim; Thomas, Arthur R.; Thompson, Colman; Thomas, Herbert Jerome; Franklin, Eugene; Thomas, John W.; Thom, Gustave; Thompson, Sydney A.; Thomas, Mrs. S. S.; Thomas, James; Thayer, Mrs. Blanche V.; Thrift, Alexander; Tompkins, Robt. A.; Trask, Sam; Treber, Birch; Turnbull, Mrs. Martha; Turner, George; Tyler, Mrs.; Van Dorn, Earl; Van Wassel, Charlie; Von Hacht, William; Vertais, Marino; Vail, John M.; Vestle; Vandenburg, Thomas; Van Tilburg, Frank; Vinson, Edward; Vincent, Donald; Volkman, Charles G.; Van Save, Mamie; Vallen, Arthur; Wallace, Roland Martin; Walker, Rupert H.; Walters, W. E.; Wallinger, E. A.; Wagner, Gus; C. B.; Walker, Rupert; Wardell, Norman; Watts, John E.; Ward Jos. M.; Ward, Arthur C.; Wangenstein, Fred Jr.; Watkins, Morrill; Wende, Bernhardt N.; Webb, John; Wentzel, G. T.; Wesner, Charles; Whelan, Maurice; Whitworth, Billie; Whitters, Joseph H.; Wharton, Bob; Whitney, Earl; Whittemore, Arthur R.; Williams, Burton Albert; Wilson, Clarence; Wilson, Christopher Terry; Wilson, Montgomery Earl; Williams, H. M.; Wickcliff, Earl; William, Wm. J.; Wilkins, Norman Glenn; Williams, James; Wilson, William H. C.; Wilkinson, Fred W.; Wilmont, P. B.; Wilson George; Willis, Amos Bradley; Winnic, Leon Lowden; Wood, Beverly; Wooten, George; Wolverton, Earl L.; Wöbber, George and Adolph; Woon, Basil D.; Wheeler, Bill; Woodruff, Emmett; Wright, Tom; Wylie, Gertrude; Yiskis, Johnie; Young, Jack; Yauker Maude; Zeller, Lieut. C. A.; Zavisink, Frank, (Alias) Slovenian, Mandes, A.

MISCELLANEOUS: Bush, Jack; Welch, Red; Wilensky; Blesh, Rudolph P.; Nicholson, Color Sergeant; Haynes, Eddie; Baker, Lee; Benson, Rutherford, John; Emma, Lena; Wood, Sarah; Miller, Goldenberg; Burke; Arbogast; Kane; Coles, Hildegards, R.; Jenks, Althea Nellie; Relatives of Maxmillian Louis Knitte; Reilly, O'Leary, Savage; Collins, T. C.; Company A 1st Kentucky; Burrill Grammar School girls and boys; U. S. Naval Aviation Repair Base; American Legion Boys; J. L.; 116th Overseas Draft Canadian M. T. Outfit; L. A. S. or Johnson J.; Red, Thomas; Richardson, Jesse, or any old shipmates; U. S. S. *John Collins* crew of or Ensigns; Co. A. 20th Inf.; Penrod, Byrd W.; McGill, Wm.; Radswapper; Dryer, Harry; Pamplum, Dusk; Mahan, Dato Chris; Bainbridge Roger J.; Lt. Rob. P. P. C. L. I. "Paddy" Diamond U. S. 2nd Batt. 27th or 28th Regt. Inf.; Hillswock, Hal; Anderson, Curly; Moore, Howard; Moore, Overall; Co. D. 7th Inf.; A. W. B. (husband); Members of Co. L 32nd U. S. V. Inf.; Sgt. Wyant; Bohana; Culver; Lt. Boyle; Members of Promethean Publ.Co.; Any one of the old 15th Sep. Bat. of the 5th Reg. U. S. Marines; Friends of Capt. George Ash; Members of two I. O. G. T. Lodges; Any one who served with D. 2 F. A. in Philippines in 1911; Turner, William; Parents of baby girl (name may be Haven); Relatives of Mary McAulay; Watson, Pvt. A. W.; Fee, Corp.; Laucatch, Sgt.; West, W. Carleton; Hetterich, Carl; Ferguson, Herman; Stair, John; Haman, Bruce; Williams, Montana or Walter; Walke, G. Baker; McConologue, Corp. James, or any of the men of Co. C. 5th Field Signal Bn.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-FEBRUARY ISSUE

In addition to the complete novel and the novelette mentioned on the second contents page, the following stories come to you with the next issue:

THE TAILED MEN — *Arthur O. Friel*
Two adventurers set out to find the human monkeys of the South American jungles.

THE SPINE OF THE MONSTER *An off-the-trail story-article* — *Theodore S. Solomons*
In the Klondike gold-rush men meet with strange obstacles.

WHEN LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST — *W. C. Tuttle*
Piperock stages a lion-and-bull fight.

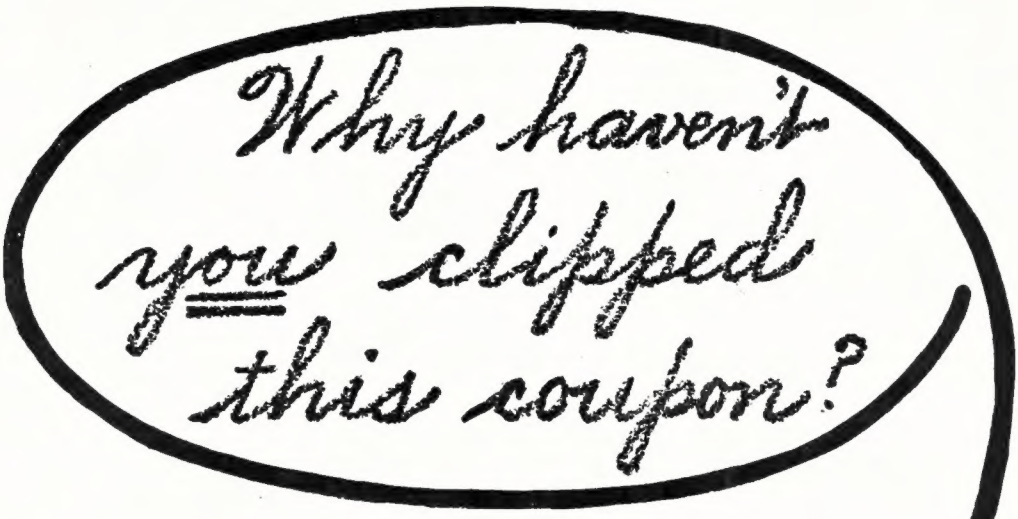
HEART OF THE RANGE Part IV — *William Patterson White*
Racey gives an exhibition of some quick shooting.

"MISSION SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED" — *Thomson Burtis*
An aviator does some high flying in the Greatest Cause of All.

DECIDEDLY FISHY — *Jack Bechdolt*
Ripe salmon-ends cause some nose-tilting in Puget Sound.

THE ONE WAY — *L. Patrick Greene*
What happened to a bum in South Africa.

THE PATH OF A KING — *John Buchan*
The thread that a viking wove through the centuries.



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- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card Writer
- ☐ Sign Painter
- ☐ Railroad Trainman
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
- ☐ Auto Repairing
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ French
- ☐ Italian

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